in the grasslands of Wyoming. McPhee's "pineys" and Ehrlich's ranch workers, notes critic Kent Ryden, are portrayed not as despoilers of the earth but as "folk manipulators of the landscape," people who are subtly and intrinsically part of the environments they inhabit. McPhee and Ehrlich typify those nature writers who listen "carefully to people in order to understand their traditional uses and interpretations of the landscape, examining the landscape itself as providing clues to human culture. In so doing, they bridge the gap between the human and nonhuman that looms so large in American nature writing and ecocriticism." 14

McPhee's and Ehrlich's literary works and Ryden's criticism suggest the fruitful new angles on environmentalism and ecocriticism that open up when we attempt to come to terms with the implications of human labor in the natural world. This chapter suggests the further possibilities that open up for environmentalists and scholars when they incorporate multicultural perspectives and literatures into their study and critical practice and when they refuse to ignore the issues of race, class, and gender. Literary works such as Fight Back appeal to other-than-dominant concepts of nature, justice, and place, concepts embedded in other cultures, other languages, and other relationships to the land. These works show us a relation to nature other than domination and exploitation, one that acknowledges the wildness not only "out there," but all around us—in the middle place that encompasses both nature and culture.

CHAPTER 4

Cultural Critique and Local Pedagogy

A Reading of Louise Erdrich's Tracks

People of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And . . . our theorizing . . . is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity?
—Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory"

The Official and Vernacular Landscapes

Every summer for six weeks, the University of Arizona campus becomes home to a new group of high school students who hail from the reservations, barrios, urban neighborhoods, and rural areas of Arizona. Having been accepted into the Med-Start Program, which introduces ethnically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students to the medical professions, seventy-five sixteen- and seventeen-year-old boys and girls flood noisily, excitedly, nervously into the lobby of their dorm on the first morning of the program. For many, it is the first time they have been so far away from home, the first time they have been to a city as large as Tucson, or the first time they have been on a university campus. If they live in some of Arizona's higher elevations, it might also be the first time they have experienced the unrelenting heat and humidity of a rainy season in the Sonoran Desert.

In those first hours, while greeting their peers, they put on a confident, "yeah, I do this all the time" face. But most wave good-bye to their parents with some apprehension and uncertainty, emotions they
endeavor to keep hidden from the others. Working to allay their concerns, experienced counselors gather them into small groups, pair them with a roommate, and help them get settled into their rooms. Later, each counselor leads his or her group on a tour of what, for most of the students, is an intimidating landscape of towering buildings, asphalt streets, concrete bike paths, and an expansive, grassy mall, lined on either side with palm trees. One of the first stops on this tour is the University Medical Center, an imposing complex of buildings where the students will spend their mornings studying anatomy, attending surgeries, and "shadowing" doctors, physical therapists, and nurses on their daily rounds. Subsequent stops include the Chemistry Building and the Humanities Building, where the students will spend their afternoons taking courses in science and composition, and attending weekly readings given by such poets and novelists as Sherman Alexie, Patricia Preciado Martin, and Alberto Rios, who spend time with the students discussing the reasons why poetry and fiction are important—especially for those who want to be healers.¹

As a program coordinator and composition instructor, I had the privilege to work with participants in the Med-Start Program for seven summers. Each year I helped greet the students as they arrived at the Tucson campus, then walked with them as they left their dorm to enter what might be thought of as the "official landscape" of Euro-American culture—a phrase loosely based on the distinction John Brinckerhoff Jackson makes between the "vernacular" and the "official" in his analysis of landscape.² The vernacular landscape is a folk landscape in which people are attuned to the contours of home and place; it is a living, breathing landscape where geological features such as Baboquivari Peak on the Tohono O'odham Nation or a cherished Catholic cathedral in a South Tucson neighborhood are alive with meaning and significance, where people, whether they live in rural or urban areas, can tell you the names of their neighbors and the names of the trees, where they have a sense of the rhythms of local culture. This landscape is the familiar, intimate landscape that most Med-Start students leave when they depart for their summer adventure on the Tucson campus.

The official landscape, as Brinckerhoff defines it, is an extraction-oriented landscape, imposed by government and corporation on local geographies without regard for local peoples, cultures, or environments. I say the students were entering the official landscape as they walked out onto the palm-lined university mall because the campus sits on land close to the Santa Cruz River, where the Tohono O'odham once cultivated floodplain gardens and where, later, Mexican American peoples grew flowers and vegetables in milpas sheltered from the searing Sonoran sun by the towering cottonwoods growing along the riverbanks. Today, the city of Tucson extracts so much groundwater to keep swimming pools filled and golf courses and university malls green that the water table has dropped dramatically, and the river and the cottonwoods have disappeared. The Tohono O'odham no longer plant corn in the mouths of arroyos, and the Mexican American barrios and milpas have been removed to make way for the Tucson Convention Center and an interstate freeway. Because Euro-American educational systems, dating back at least to Descartes, have supported the imposition of the official landscape, in part, by promoting the notion that the powerful and educated must separate local concerns from universal truths, the University of Arizona campus (indeed, all university campuses in the United States) might be read as a metonomy for the social and institutional power that grants state and corporate entities the authority to remove, extract, develop, and pave over the vernacular landscape.

For centuries, students entering the official landscape of Euro-American higher learning have been taught to become citizens of a world city of ideas and books; to renounce, minimize, or ignore their citizenship in their own families, cultures, and vernacular landscapes; to value the universal; and to embrace an aesthetic that supposedly transcends time and place.¹ This age-old tradition has had all sorts of historical consequences for poor and marginalized and for people of color, who view family, culture, and place as primary—not the least of which has been their exclusion (until relatively recently) from U.S. institutions of higher learning and a discrediting of their traditional knowledges, literatures, and arts. This historical exclusion and the stories told about it by those who have been excluded are often at the root of the apprehension and uncertainty some Med-Start students feel as their parents drive away from the dorm. For example, if a student is American Indian and the first in her family to be college bound, stories about grandmothers, fathers, or uncles who were marginalized socially and educationally by being forcibly sent away from an intimate, familiar landscape to government boarding schools where they were stripped of their names, cultures, and languages will almost certainly play a role in how she
experiences her educational journey into the official landscape. If a student is African American, his perceptions will be shaped, in part, by stories about laws passed to prevent his forebears from learning to read and write, about their struggle to gain admittance to U.S. educational institutions, and about the institutionalized racism they faced once they got there.

However, the resistance, persistence, and triumph embedded in these stories often provides strong motivation for students to enter the official landscape, despite their doubts and concerns regarding what the experience may hold for them. When asked to write about what compels them to seek a college education, Med-Start students often mention historical figures such as Harriet Tubman, W. E. B. Du Bois, Chief Joseph, Martin Luther King Jr., César Chávez, or some member of the family or community who contested the official landscape through activism or resistance—sometimes by participating in the Civil Rights movement, sometimes by obtaining an education despite the obstacles, or often by quietly persevering in a heroic effort to provide their children with more educational and economic opportunities than they themselves were afforded. Many American Indian students, for example, tell stories about sitting as children on the laps of grandmothers or fathers or aunts who told them stories about running away from their boarding school, sneaking off into corners to speak forbidden tribal languages with friends, or passively resisting injustice by failing to perform schoolwork or chores in expected ways. These stories distinctly embody an attitude of resistance to the federal government’s efforts to control Indian people by depicting the storytellers as courageous for their resistance. At the same time, the stories often end with grandmother or father or uncle admonishing the child to stay in school, and they thus show acceptance of education as a positive goal. These kinds of family and community stories help hundreds of students step out into the official landscape armed with a courage and strength gained in the vernacular landscape.

Programs such as Med-Start (as well as Women’s Studies, American Indian Studies, African American Studies, etc.), which aim to alter the contours of the official landscape of the United States by welcoming the children and grandchildren of ethnic and minority groups into colleges and universities, are unique in many ways because they owe their very existence in academia to the struggles of national figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. or of activists working at the community level or of other less-visible, but no less extraordinary people (grandmothers telling stories to children sitting on their laps). None of these people necessarily had as their goal the creation of new scholarly fields or programs. But the individuals working in literary and cultural studies—especially those whose scholarly and pedagogical work focuses on the literatures of marginalized groups—recognize, remember, and honor the struggle of these people by remaining committed to the goals of the Civil Rights movement. They see themselves as working for specific peoples living in specific places and are intent on doing academic work in ways that move us toward a future that looks nothing like the landscape of Euro-American domination and control.

**A Valorizing Academism versus Local Pedagogy**

In his 1992 presidential address to the Modern Languages Association, Houston Baker observed that the Civil Rights movement challenged the academic community to acknowledge that immersing college students in the ideas and theories of Western Europe and New England did not necessarily move us toward the creation of a more just and equal society. As a result, many academic professionals came to regard the classroom not as a place for the transfer of placeless universals from professor to student, but as a “local” place “for critically reading one’s self and the world with the goal of changing both.” Speaking specifically to those working in literary and cultural studies, Baker suggested that working for transformative social change will take more than the incorporation of multicultural literatures and perspectives into the curriculum; it will take the committed practice of a local pedagogy, one informed by a better understanding of local peoples, cultures, histories, and geographies. Teaching multicultural literatures and perspectives almost certainly broadens a student’s knowledge of diverse cultures, but if everyone across the United States is teaching the same multicultural literary works, the same Native American novel, or the same Chicana poetry in the same ways, there is the danger, Baker argued, that “our resolute inclusiveness amounts to no more than a thoughtless pandering to high-flown, abstract ideals” (404). To avoid the dangers of standardizing or of normalizing our discussions of race, class, and gender, we must invite our students into a discussion of the ways in which literary works are rooted in the particulars of place and time, and make connections between the
works they are reading and the ways in which they themselves are rooted, to go back to the terms I have been using in this chapter, in a vernacular landscape.

Most teachers and literary critics would agree that literature has something to teach us about being human, something universal that transcends the limits of historical and geographical origin in its meaning and beauty. But literature cannot teach us about the literal places our students might take us unless, in our classroom discussions, we grant them pedagogical license to bring their own knowledges and cultures into the classroom. Yet, how can we invite local and regional cultures into the room or make connections between those cultures and what our students are reading or even recognize who the students in our classes are if we know nothing about local cultures or are so blinded by our own academic specializations that we cannot see what our students have to offer? The first step of a local pedagogy, then, would take us outside our classrooms to walk across our campus malls or the local convention center parking lot (both of which represent a general cartography of white, man-centered legitimacy and control), toward the banks of a once free-flowing but now dry, unshaded riverbed, where we would stand for a time and contemplate past and present histories of the indigenous, local, and regional cultures that still survive just outside the campus gates.

Back in our classrooms, we would look around the room and notice who is sitting there, then teach in ways that would provide our students with educational experiences that accommodate in some manner the irresolvable tension between the local and universal, the vernacular and official. Recognizing that our students and their communities are often in touch with knowledges and forces beyond our own lives and academic specialties, we would practice a local pedagogy that might look something like the Med-Start Program. The instructors who teach in this program employ many conventionally accepted pedagogical methods to teach students anatomy, chemistry, and composition, but they also invite students to bring their own local knowledges into the academy. After shadowing doctors at the Medical Center and reading Leslie Silko’s Ceremony or Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima for their composition classes, students of American Indian or Mexican American descent might write personal essays about how the traditional healing practices of a Diné medicine man or a Mexican American curandera present additional or complementary alternatives and further possibilities to accepted Western medical practices. If an ecological perspective teaches us to see everything as connected to everything else, then the practice of this kind of local pedagogy might be thought of as “ecological” in that it encourages students to see connections, to envision a middle place between the local and the universal, and to contest campus landscapes where Western philosophies that separate science from story, history from health, and economics from ecology are literally reflected in the built environment.

Describing his presidential address as a “summons” to a renewed life in teaching, Baker recalled an incident that occurred during a course he was teaching on African American women’s literature. One evening, a young black female student attempted to make connections between her reading of Phyllis Wheatley’s poetry and her own contemporary experiences, but Bake reprimanded her, telling her that in his classroom, students will root their discussions in theory and forms of literature, not descend into the realm of the personal experience or the local landscape. Later, a walk across his own university landscape made him more cognizant of the virulent racism still institutionalized in a row of fraternity houses prominently located on a prestigious and heavily used corridor of the University of Pennsylvania—called Locust Walk. Baker began to wonder how the experience of his young black student—who had to negotiate her way past the white fraternity houses each week on her way to class and who therefore endured the racial slurs inevitably hurled at her by fraternity members—shaped her reading and discussion of Phyllis Wheatley’s poetry. But having denied her the opportunity to bring her personal experience into his classroom, he saw that he had denied himself and his other students the benefit of her mapping of the connections between the local landscape and his official, literary one. He concluded that if our students’ classroom experiences are to provide them with the tools to build landscapes different from the Locust Walks of this country, then we will need to allow our students to chart the contours of their local landscapes and experiences and to bring their “maps” into the classroom. This kind of “local mapping” must be considered integral to the development of useful and practical reading skills for the twenty-first century (405).

Yet too often, as Baker’s own story illustrates, teachers, scholars, and students of literature are encouraged to be more concerned with other
critics' texts and with the development of theory-informed reading skills than with learning to map the shared connections between literature and local people and landscapes. In this official literary landscape, theory is commodified and becomes the basis on which scholars are hired and promoted in academic institutions, a curious critical environment, observed Baker, that often leads to a "valorizing academicism" or an inverse correlation between the intellectual achievements of the scholar-teacher and the amount of time, energy, and patience he or she devotes to the classroom and to students (405).

Baker's concerns echo those of many women-of-color critics who question the privileging of certain postmodern modes of theorizing in university courses, especially those focused on the study of literature. In *Making Face, Making Soul*, a collection of the creative and critical writings of women of color, critics such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Barbara Christian do not dismiss theory *tou
court*. We need to theorize our most pressing social problems, they point out, in order to understand how we might work collectively for change. But in academia, the definitions of what counts as theory are often very narrow. Theory is thought of as those inaccessible texts addressed to a privileged, predominantly Anglo-European social group and characterized by words such as *profound*, *serious*, *substantial*, and *consequential*. Theory is constructed as the antithesis of story or fiction, which is often described with words such as *playful*, *imaginative*, and *nonsensical*. Christian and Anzaldúa observe that it seems highly suspicious that just at the moment when writers of color are producing literature that emerges from the vernacular landscapes they inhabit—literature that reclaims or reinvets identities and unmask the power relations of the world—theory is invested with more status than literature. They challenge literary and cultural critics to pay renewed attention to fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, *not just as literature, but as a way of “doing theory in another mode."

In the spirit of speculating about the kinds of readings that might work to move us away from a valorizing academicism and toward pedagogies that aim to develop a shared sense of responsibility for local situations, I move now into a brief discussion of theory and argue for the practice of a transformative cultural critique that would help us build a more just and equitable world. I then offer a reading of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* that I hope is suggestive of why cultural and literary critics should treat multicultural literatures not only as literary work but as theoretical work that gives us insight into how marginalized groups have always challenged the official landscape of Euro-American domination and control. I end the chapter by coming back to my Med-Start students and briefly discussing how this kind of reading might be employed in the practice of a transformative local pedagogy.

**Transformative Cultural Critique**

In chapter three, I explained why conceptions of the natural world as wilderness end up being theoretically incoherent and politically ineffective, and I drew some connections to the ways in which conceptions of identity that posit an endless play of difference and "otherness" block the capacity for effective alliance and directed action. I challenged literary and cultural critics to bring their theoretical work down to earth, to make it relevant by continually moving back and forth between the universal and the local, and by working for transformative change with particular groups of people in specific places. Feminist critics Gloria Anzaldúa, Barbara Christian, and Teresa Ebert argue for something very similar. Contemporary academic theory, they observe, is often considered irrelevant by community leaders and grassroots activists working among the poor and working classes because it seems to hold little promise for moving us toward collective social and environmental change.

In an essay arguing for a cultural studies that eschews academicism and works toward concrete social change, Teresa Ebert articulates the differences she sees between postmodern theory and "transformative cultural critique." Dominant forms of postmodern theory, Ebert explains, seek open access to the free play of signification (through parody, irony, and experimentation). These theories advocate cultural equality through semiotic activism and rearticulate the notion of politics solely as a language effect, substituting "valuation for critique and affirmation for opposition." In other words, this kind of theory affirms already existing social differences, and sees this affirmation as, in itself, an effective mode of social resistance to dominant culture. No attempt is made by those who engage in this kind of theory to explain why and how social, racial, or economic differences came into being or how existing social institutions might be collectively changed so that economic resources and cultural power might be distributed without regard to gender, race, class, or sexuality.
In effect, postmodernist theories intimate the end of transformative politics, making emancipation or the collective social struggle to end exploitation simply a metaphysical project: a metanarrative. Instead of explaining how we might work toward transformative social change, Ebert observes, these theories place emphasis on “pleasure—pleasure in/of textuality, the local, the popular, and above all, the body (jouissance)” (7–8). Scholars who engage in postmodern critique often share a commitiment to overturning the dualism that associates women and “Others” with the body in ways that negatively and systematically represent them as ruled by their bodies instead of by their minds. In opposition to this alienating abstraction, they posit the body as a concrete, anticonceptual, material knowledge that is both diassociating and creative. They argue that the experience of the female body—its pleasures, desires, and needs—locates women in a specific, particular, material knowledge of daily life and involves them in creative, nondominating relations of nurturing and connection with others.

The problem, writes Ebert, is that pleasure and desire “can be the overriding concern only for classes of people (middle and upper) who are already ‘free’ from economic want… This fetishization of pleasure validates the priorities and privileges of the middle class—in spite of its attention to the ‘pleasures’ of others—for it produces a cultural studies that largely erases the needs, conditions, and exploitation of the working poor and the impoverished underclass, an underclass that is often denied basic economic and human rights, an underclass that is overwhelmingly not ‘white’” (8). Furthermore, by taking refuge in a seemingly anticonceptual biological, biographical, textual body free from economic want or racial marginalization, postmodern critics often remove the “body” from history, affirming social differences but failing to explicate how systematic practices of exploitation based on socially constructed gender, race, sexual, and class differences operate.

Some significant parallels might be drawn between writing that conceptualizes nature as wilderness—and heralds the “death of nature”— and writing that, though claiming to be anticonceptual, essentializes the body as a concept and intimates the end of transformative politics. Both, for the most part, are produced by writers and scholars who are, regardless of race or nationality, predominantly middle-class professionals largely from North America, Britain, and Australia, and who are thus part of the minority of the world appropriating the majority of the world’s resources. Both types of writing obscure the effects on each of us of socioeconomic and ecological forces that require us to work in the biophysical world for our own survival and place us within a class system that does not give us all equal access to education, money, privilege, or power. Both posit that there can be no middle place or common ground on which we might come together to develop a sense of our shared situation.

As I stated in the previous chapter, writers and scholars are free to address any subject or issue they choose on the basis of their individual talents and preferences. However, writing—whether creative or theoretical—that erases the needs, conditions, and exploitation of the underclasses and simply validates social differences cannot provide like and unlike people with enough common ground on which to come together and find answers to urgent questions about the exploitation and suffering of the poor and marginalized in economically depressed and ecologically degraded areas of the world. Theories that indulge in the pleasure of the text or invite us to “play” can be insightful, even necessary when they problematize or denaturalize dominant meanings and open up space in which to create new meanings. But if we want to transform society, we need theories that do more than valorize academicism, theories that emerge from a middle place between the universal and the local, theories that do cultural work in the world, theories that provide us with explanatory critique and alternatives for change, theories that give us the tools to build a more socially and environmentally just society.

If we want to create landscapes different from Euro-American landscapes of domination and control, we will need to articulate our different positions, analyze and explicate the underlying bases of social and ecological injustices, and find common ground by exploring our shared situations and responsibilities. But how can we come together or find that common ground if we are speaking a language to which only the elite few are privy? This is not to dismiss out of hand the language in which most postmodernist theoretical texts are written; all professional fields have specialized languages only a few individuals are trained to read, and specialized language is often necessary for articulating complex concepts. But at the outset we determine that we are working not to reach the few, but the many, then that determination will guide the orientation we (writers, critics, teachers) take in our work, the language
we use, and the purposes for which our work is intended. The problem with most postmodern theory is not that the language is often difficult to read, but that dense metaphysical language, as Gloria Anzaldúa has observed, "does not translate well when one's intention is to communicate to masses of people made up of different audiences" (xxv).

Women-of-color critics note that only relatively recently have women, people of color, and the poor and working classes been given access to those cultural and institutional practices—education and literacy—through which individuals are enabled to produce new concepts and legitimize them. Historically, they have been restricted in their ability to produce academically accepted theories and concepts, silenced by a privileged few, who excluded their knowledges from what might be termed the "official landscape of academia." But if theory, to use Ebert's useful definition, is a way of knowing that reveals that "what is" is not necessarily the real/true but rather only the existing actuality which is transformable," and if the role of cultural critique is "the production of historical knowledges that mark the transformability of existing social arrangements and the possibility of a different social organization" (9), then it becomes entirely possible to see how traditional folktales, proverbs, trickster stories, and animal tales might be considered "theory." If the aim of cultural critique is not the free play of signification or cognitive delight—the joys of knowing—but explication that makes connections and clarifies why certain complex concepts matter in people's lives and how they operate in society, then it also becomes entirely possible to see how stories might be just as effective as academic prose at conveying complex concepts. As Barbara Christian assures us, "people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And ... our theorizing ... is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking."

Moreover, if the aim of cultural critique is to reach people outside the academic community—people of all races and classes, people such as my Med-Start students and their families, people who still have ties to a vernacular landscape—then it becomes possible to understand why writers, storytellers, and even critics might prefer fiction, narrative, and poetry to the often stilted prose associated with academia. For those who have struggled for decades to make their various voices heard, Christian argues, the poetry and fiction emerging from traditional stories and

folktales and from specific places and particular communities are not simply "an occasion for discourse among critics but . . . necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better" (336). Consequently, if we want to understand what multicultural communities and literatures have to teach us about theory and how they are offering tools honed in the vernacular landscape to people stepping out into the official landscape, we will need to read literature as cultural critique. The reading of Tracks that follows is intended to illustrate this point.

The Oral Tradition as Cultural Critique

Chippewa writer Louise Erdrich has never claimed to be writing literary criticism or cultural critique or to be writing for an audience of literary critics. She has said that she sees her primary audience as American Indians, who she hopes will "read, laugh, cry, really take in the work." A member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, she adds that her novels are shaped by the constantly "changing, ongoing, vital, oral and literary traditions" of her tribe. Chippewa oral tradition can be described as "ongoing" and "vital" because variant versions of the myths and stories have always shifted and changed depending on the storyteller, his or her personality, the occasion, the location, and the audience. A storyteller often revises and retells a story, and the audience, already familiar with the stories as traditionally told, understands that the storyteller's version is an interpretation of the traditional text. Although new versions of a story might not be called literary criticism by community members, they can be seen as a criticism and commentary on the tale as previously told.

In the sense that every new telling of a traditional story is a critique of earlier versions of the story, Tracks enters into a kind of critical conversation with past and present tellers of traditional Chippewa myths. The novel assumes an implicitly theoretical stance by taking up traditional stories about bears, wolves, bearwalkers, lion-monsters, manitous, and wendigo, and transforming them into a narrative that constantly transgresses boundaries between oral narrative and written narrative, past and present, questioning and reinterpreting each in order to create new stories from old elements.

Erdrich also invokes the sense of an oral performance by offering the
perspectives of two narrators—Pauline and Nanapush—who tell the story of Fleur, the last female survivor of the Pillager clan. Both narrators tell their versions of Fleur's story in the first person, as if their audiences were present and engaged in the act of judging which narrator's version is the more credible. In alternating chapters, Pauline speaks directly to the reader, and Nanapush speaks to Fleur's grown child, Lulu. Analyzing Fleur as if she were literally a text, each narrator finds evidence to formulate a general theory to explain events that occurred on the reservation from 1912 to 1924.

Because Fleur is a member of the respected Pillager family, leaders in the tribe and members of the powerful bear clan, it is not surprising that both narrators associate her not only with stories about bears, but also with stories about several traditional Chippewa totemic animals. At times, Fleur, with her “teeth, strong and sharp and very white,” embodies the traits of the mythic Wolf. On other occasions, with her “skin of lakeweeds” (22), thin green dress, and damp, tail-like braids (18), she is associated with Mishepesshu, the lake monster. Like the totemic animal, Fleur combines the elements of many texts—Wolf, Mishepesshu, and Bear—in complicated and mysterious ways. As a text, she opens the oral tradition to the possibility of new interpretations, revealing—to revisit Teresa Ebert's explanation of the role of cultural critique—that “what is is not necessarily the real/true but rather only the existing actuality which is transformable” (9).

Throughout the novel, however, Erdrich is careful to point out that Fleur's ambiguity, which becomes a metaphor for the openness of transformational myths to resignification, is not an invitation to endless interpretive play for the sake of play. Her concerns parallel those of critics such as Barbara Christian and Gloria Anzaldúa, who decry the uses of theory when it becomes mere metaphysical abstraction rather than explanatory critique grounded in the history and politics of community and place. In traditional Chippewa society, individual members of the tribe did not seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge or for a vision or seek contact with one of the gods merely to satisfy their own curiosity. Although the gods, or manitou, were thought of as personal beings who were generous and given to sharing their power with humans, they were sought with great caution and usually only if help was urgently needed to answer a question of grave social concern. When Nanapush urges Fleur to seek contact with her helper, Mishepesshu, Fleur is distraught over her inability to pay the taxes on her land. “Go down to the shore,” Nanapush urges her. “Make your face black and cry out until your helpers listen” (177). This scene implies that stories about transformational beings—and the novel Tracks itself—open the oral tradition to the possibility of resignification and recontextualization, but only for the purpose of answering urgent questions that face the community.

In transforming the oral tradition to create Fleur, Erdrich creates a kind of middle place between the oral tradition and contemporary literature. Her text—Fleur—has many faces, no fixed identity, and cannot be brought into any kind of order because she is being “told” by two narrators whose interpretations of the “text” often contradict each other. Like the oral tradition itself, Fleur becomes the object of continual telling and retelling, a narrative strategy that draws readers themselves into the middle place to participate, along with Erdrich, in the theorizing process. As if they were at an actual storytelling session, readers must “listen” to both Pauline’s and Nanapush’s stories, carefully weighing each interpretation against what they know about each narrator and then engage in some cultural critique of their own.

**Imposing an Official Landscape**

Most literary critics agree that readings are situated within a system of social, political, economic, cultural, and personal circumstances that direct readers to particular readings and, further, to particular constructions of reality. Through her narrators, Erdrich explores how different conceptions of reality are situated, theorized, and constructed. Like literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, she is interested in how a monologic Voice of Authority can impose an official landscape without regard to local people or places, whereas multiple voices and points of view can reveal the possibilities inherent in the invisible, vernacular landscape. She illustrates this concept by showing how each narrators' interpretation of Fleur is shaped by his or her relation to authority and tradition. In the novel, authority is represented by the Catholic Church and by the grid—or official landscape—imposed by the U.S. Congress after passage of the Dawes Act. Tradition is represented by Chippewa culture and by an invisible, vernacular landscape alive with the spirits of the recent dead and noisy with the voices of Wolf, Bear, Mishepesshu, and other manitou.
The narration of *Tejakö* begins in 1912, twenty-five years after the Dawes Act divided Indian lands into individual holdings, purportedly for the purpose of promoting self-supporting farming and ranching among American Indian peoples. In actuality, the bill provided no provisions for seeds or for farming and ranching equipment, but did provide detailed provisions for the reduction of Indian lands and the sale to whites of unallotted lands. Passage of the bill led to massive dispossession and starvation, which weakened indigenous communities and made members of these communities more susceptible to disease. The staggering number of deaths disrupted tribal social relations forever and led to the sale of unclaimed allotments to whites, who became the owners of great tracts of land within reservation boundaries.

In the wake of the federal government’s imposition of the reservation system on Chippewa communities and of the passage of the Dawes Act, both Pauline and Nanapush lose their entire families to disease and are unsure about how to move forward in a rapidly changing world. Both search the intimate, vernacular landscape that once provided the Chippewa with a theoretical understanding of their world for answers to the urgent social questions that face them. But they end up on opposite sides of the question of allotment. Pauline and her adopted family, the Morrisseys, argue that lands lost to death with no heir and lands foreclosed because starving people cannot earn enough money to pay their taxes should be put on the auction block (173–74). Nanapush and his adopted families, the Pillagers and Kashpaws, are “holdouts,” believing that tribal lands should continue to be held communally.

A mixed-blood descendant of both whites and Puyats (members of a little respected Chippewa clan traditionally assigned the role of butchers and skinners), Pauline turns her back on the disease and death she attributes to the inferiority and backwardness of Chippewa culture and embraces the world of white culture: “I wanted to be like my mother, who showed her half-white. I wanted to be like my grandfather, pure Canadian. That was because even as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish” (14). Pauline is described by Nanapush as tall, skinny, invisible, and greedy, characteristics that the Chippewa associate with the windigo. In traditional Chippewa tales, windigo is a giant skeleton of ice that represents the fear of winter starvation and cannibalism. It is said that people “go windigo” when a dangerous spirit takes possession of their soul, causing them to become greedy, gluttonous, and have an insatiable desire for human flesh. As A. Irvin Hallowell explains, the fear of the windigo is really a fear of excessiveness of any kind. In Chippewa culture, a balance, a sense of proportion must be maintained in all interpersonal relations and activities. Hoarding or any manifestation of greed is disowned. Even overeating for spiritual knowledge is judged to be “as greedy as hoarding.” Pauline, who acts “afflicted, touched in the mind” (39), is judged by Nanapush to be windigo not because she rejects her Chippewa heritage but because her need for status leads her to excessive behaviors that exhibit no feeling for other humans.

While living in the off-reservation town of Argus, for example, Pauline watches coldly as Fleur is raped by her employer and two other men. Then she coolly closes the door to the meat locker where the men who raped Fleur are waiting out a tornado, an act that results in the immediate death of two men and the slow demise of another. Six years later, she kills in cold blood again: this time, she strangles her lover, Napoleon Morrissey, the father of the child she abandons. Later, she absolves herself of any responsibility for the murder, observing, “I felt a growing horror and trembled all through my limbs until it suddenly was revealed to me that I had committed no sin. There was no guilt in this matter, no fault” (203).

Despite the murder, which goes unsolved, Pauline enters a Catholic convent, greedy for spiritual knowledge and determined to take the vows of a nun. She has come to believe that her people, like the buffalo, are dying out (140). Turning away from a culture she judges to be doomed, she gives herself a “mission” to “name and baptize” and lead her people to the “new road” of Christ—away from the traditional Chippewa four-day road to the afterworld (140). Aligning herself with the authority of the church, she begins to speak as if she herself were greater than Christ—a disembodied Voice of Authority. She molds her interpretation of Fleur’s story to fit this single-minded vision of theological certainty, linking Fleur—and her bear power—to traditional Chippewa ceremonies, cures, dances, and love medicines. Fleur, she believes, is the “hinge” on a door that can swing open or closed, keeping people from entering on “Christ’s Road” (139). So Pauline appoints herself door monitor and gives herself the responsibility of preventing Fleur from swinging the door open.

Speaking to anyone who will listen to a Puyat, Pauline, who claims to want to close the door on the invisible landscape, nevertheless opens it occasionally when she sees an opportunity to increase her own status as
an “authority” on Chippewa culture. Making Fleur the target of her vicious rumors, Pauline reminds people that when Fleur returned from Argus, she lived alone at Matchimanito Lake. A “young girl had never done such a thing before” (8). Citing Fleur’s anomalous actions and her inherited bear power, Pauline accuses Fleur of wielding the malign powers of a bearwalking sorcerer, or one who transforms herself into a bear in order to use her power for self-aggrandizement. According to Chippewa oral traditions, bearwalkers manifest their evil power by appearing as bright lights at night, stealing the fingers and tongues of the dead, and causing the dreaded affliction most associated with bearwalkers, “twisted mouth.” Fleur, Pauline lets it be known, has gotten herself into some half-forgotten medicine that causes her to mess with evil, place the heart of an owl on her tongue, carry the finger of a child in her pocket, and affict a Morrissey with twisted mouth (122).

Pauline’s mission to “close the door” on her people and her community is clearly linked to the abstract forms of logic on which the hierarchies of Western culture have been based, hierarchies that place God above humans, humans above nonhumans, and “civilized” cultures above those considered primitive. To support and maintain this official, hierarchical landscape, Pauline must close the door on a vernacular landscape in which gods walk among humans, the boundaries between humans and nature are permeable, and everything in the natural world is connected to everything else. She must turn a blind eye to whatever does not fit into the official landscape being imposed on the Chippewa and on their lands by church and state. She must not notice, for example, the connections between malnutrition and U.S. government policies. When she visits Fleur and her family, she ignores the starvation they are obviously suffering. Although Fleur is malnourished and struggling to carry a pregnancy to term, Pauline, who eats meals daily at the convent, shows up at Fleur’s door and asks, “You wouldn’t have a little scrap to eat…” (142), knowing that Fleur will not refuse to feed a guest. When, during the course of this visit, Fleur goes into labor, delivers a premature child, and nearly dies, Pauline does nothing to help. Watching Fleur’s face drain of color, she remembers, “I knew this look and I was fascinated, rapt, as at other death- and sickbeds” (156). Pauline’s “reading” of Fleur’s circumstances and of the circumstances of the community erases the needs, conditions, and oppression of the Chippewa people and makes no connections between the U.S. government’s allotment of small portions of land to individual tribal members and the simultaneous imposition of restrictions limiting traditional food-gathering activities. She situates herself above this reality, coldly abstracting herself from the social, material, and environmental struggles of her people.

Because she has so closely aligned herself with the voices of the official landscape, Pauline’s words are suspect among her own people, which is perhaps the reason why she is narrating her story to no one in particular. The suspicion with which she is regarded calls attention to the fact that her abstract vision of the world is not rooted in local history and takes no account of the community. She is fully aware of her complicity in the attempted silencing of the vernacular landscape. After murdering her lover, she justifies the act by claiming that she has not murdered a man but tamed the lake monster, who is not a lake monster at all, but Satan: “I believed that the monster was tamed that night, sent to the bottom of the lake and chained there by my deed” (204). She links the silencing of the lake monster with the imposition of the official landscape. The morning after the murder, she recalls with malicious satisfaction, “a surveyor’s crew arrived at the turnoff to Matchimanito in a rattling truck, and set to measuring. Surely that was the work of Christ’s hand” (204). Trivializing the inevitable displacement and suffering that will follow the division and sale of tribal lands, she adds: “The place will be haunted I suppose, but no one will have ears sharp enough to hear the Pillagers’ low voices, or the vision clear enough to see their still shadows” (204–5).

By removing her people from history and attempting to cut them off from an oral tradition and culture that once provided them with tools to interpret and understand the world around them, Pauline gives her people no alternatives, no avenues of resistance, and no hope of opposing the official landscape being imposed on the vernacular landscape. Obfuscating rather than explicating, obscuring rather than revealing, Pauline’s reading of Fleur illustrates how cold, theoretical abstractions that are rooted in greed or in a need for personal aggrandizement and that take no account of local voices in the landscape can literally silence those voices forever.

Contesting the Official Landscape

Unlike the morbid Pauline, Nanapush is associated with life, community, laughter, and healing, and he is constantly challenging authority
and established order. Although he is only "fifty winters old" when he begins his narration of Fleur's story, his life has spanned the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Somehow, he has survived fever, pox, spotted sickness, broken treaties, and dispossession. Clearly making connections between disease and the land losses associated with broken treaties and the Dawes Act, he understands that his entire family died from diseases contracted after they were forced onto reservations. Where "[p]eople were forced close together," he states, "the clans dwindled. Our tribe unraveled like a coarse rope, frayed at either end as the old and new among us were taken." (2). At one point, he is so overcome by sorrow he decides to die, but like the Chippewa trickster Nanabozho, he recovers somehow, saving himself "by starting a story. . . . I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on." (46). He uses his meager strength to help others, taking the seventeen-year-old Fleur to his cabin after discovering her, half frozen, among the bodies of family members who have succumbed to starvation and consumption.

Nanapush implies that his narration of Fleur's story is a kind of ceremony he is performing for Lulu, Fleur's only living child, who, as a teenager, returns to the reservation filled with bitterness toward Fleur for sending her away from an intimate, familiar landscape to an official one—the government boarding school. At the school, Lulu attempts to run away, but is caught and severely punished, made to wear orange-colored clothes, scrub long sidewalks, and kneel for hours on broomstick handles. Calling on the maanitou to help him, Nanapush uses story, song, and rattle to create a ceremony that will heal Lulu. His story of Fleur is like a chant: "She sent you to the government school, it is true, but you must understand there were reasons: there would be no place for you, no safety on this reservation, no hiding from government papers, or from Morrisseys... or the Turcot Company, leveler of a whole forest." (217).

The position of Erdrich's two narrators in relation to Chippewa culture and to Euro-American governmental and religious authority gives readers some intimation of how the once happy, confident Lulu became a hurt, resentful child. Pauline, a Catholic nun who eventually becomes "Sister Leopolda," a convent schoolteacher in Erdrich's Love Medicine, represents the voices Lulu would have encountered in the official landscape. Supporting and maintaining the landscape of official-

dom, Pauline—and Lulu's teachers—see education as the transfer of placeless "universal" knowledge to the children in their charge. They close the door on the significance of the children's own cultures by insisting that they are only the superstitions of a primitive people. Thus, the voices of officialdom rob the children of their first confidence in being able to understand and interpret the world around them and in knowing how to move within it.

But where voices of officialdom rely on institutionally sanctioned ideologies and theories to constric, transfix, objectify, and dehumanize, Nanapush insists on employing the transformative, emancipatory aspects of cultural critique to confront the violence of controlling systems—be they governmental, religious, economic, or textual. He teaches Lulu that her heritage and traditions are not meaningless superstitions. Through Fleur's powerful bear-clan bloodline, the old ways course into the modern world. Through Fleur, Nanapush tells Lulu, the maanitou speak: "Turtle's quavering scratch, the Eagle's high shriek, Loon's crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear's low rasp" (59).

Nanapush is not romanticizing the vernacular landscape; rather, he is illustrating for Lulu how Fleur's ties to the living, breathing landscape of the maanitou provide her with an alternate vision, one that assures her that the official landscape is not necessarily the real/true, but only the existing reality, which is transformable. By telling and retelling Fleur's story to Lulu, Nanapush is engaging in an age-old interpretive process: opening the ancient traditions and stories of his people to the possibility of reinterpretation and resignification. Though the invisible landscape is being destroyed by those who seek to replace it with an official landscape, he encourages Lulu to find answers to the urgent social and ecological questions facing the community by leaving the door open to a continuing dialogue between the old world and the new.

Nanapush's interpretation of Fleur's story makes strong connections between the marginalization of people and the degradation of the environment, showing Lulu how the imposition of an official landscape leads directly to Fleur's dispossession from Matchimanto Lake and results in Lulu's being sent away to boarding school. Once, Nanapush recalls, the Pillagers met all their needs by trading "with fur, meat, hides or berries" (56). But after the institution of the reservation system and then passage of the Dawes Act, Fleur is forced to scramble for ways to earn the money to pay the taxes the government imposes on each parcel
of allotted land. If she does not pay, she is told by both the Indian agent and the Catholic priest, her land will be put on the auction block and sold to the highest bidder. When Fleur falls behind in her payments, the young priest, Father Damien, travels to Matchimanito Lake to inform her that a group of whites is interested in buying the Pillagers’ allotted lands and building a fishing lodge for tourists.

But Fleur refuses to sell out. In a desperate bid to raise money, she and her family strip every bush around Matchimanito Lake for the cranberry bark they sell weekly to the white tonic dealer. The hard physical labor changes Fleur and degrades the vegetation on her land. “Though she traveled through the bush with gunnysacks and her skinning knife, though she worked past her strength, tireless, . . . Fleur was a different person than the young woman I had known. She was hesitant in speaking, false in her gestures, anxious to cover her fear” (177).

Thrust into a wage economy she only partially understands and in which she is ill-prepared to operate, she remains unrewarded for her tireless labors; her worst fears are realized when she is unable to keep Matchimanito Lake from being sold to the Turcot Lumber Company or to prevent her family from being dispossessed. Her situation illustrates, as cultural critic Nancy Hartsock expresses it, that the dominant class, race, and gender actively structures and envisions “the world in a way that forms the material-social relations in which all parties are forced to participate; their vision, therefore, cannot be dismissed as simply false or misguided. In consequence, oppressed groups must struggle for their own vision, which will require both theorizing and the education that can come only from committed political struggle to change those material and social relations.” Realizing that she cannot fight the dominant culture solely based on a Chippewa vision of the world, Fleur enters the struggle to change power relations between her people and the voices of officialdom by sending Lulu to boarding school, a wrenchingly difficult decision that leaves her scarred and grieving and that makes Lulu resentful and bitter.

Nanapush depicts Fleur as courageous, and her story conveys an attitude of resistance to control of Indian people. At the same time, he clearly shows that domination and marginalization rarely, if ever, create better people; on the contrary, people are often defeated and scarred by the large-scale political, economic, and religious forces operating outside their local communities and environments. Upon Lulu’s return to the reservation after her damaging boarding school experience, Nanapush gathers her into his arms, tells her Fleur’s story, and invites her to look around at the bureaucratic, official grid imposed on Indian peoples and their lands by government agents and religious authorities. The Chippewa, he observes, are becoming a “tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-spaced documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees” (225). He recognizes that the Chippewa will never again live in the world into which he was born; therefore, the struggle for alternate visions of the world will require his people to gain some manner of access to the power to change material, social, and environmental relations. This is the reason, he tells Lulu, that he has learned to read newspapers and government reports, to write letters, and to wade through a “blizzard of legal forms,” and the reason why he later enters politics and is elected tribal chairman (225). It is also the reason, he implies, why Fleur decides to send Lulu to a government school: she hopes her daughter might acquire additional tools to help herself and her people enter the official landscape and effect change.

Struggling for alternative visions of the world, then, requires a knowledge not only of the vernacular landscape but of the official one as well. Moving intelligently and cautiously between these two landscapes, Nanapush opens both to the possibility of reinterpretation and resignment, and finds tools to create new ceremonies and new knowledges in both places. He ushers Lulu into a middle place between the two, saving her with a story, by showing her the power and significance of her mother’s experiences at the same time that he is showing her how she might use her boarding school education to fight for justice. The story of Fleur’s tireless struggle to change the material and social relations between her people and officialdom, and of her eventual dispossession exposes an injustice. By describing this injustice, Nanapush finds ground for critique of dominant institutions and ideologies that benefit only the elite few, and offers his insight to his granddaughter.

In Tracks, Louise Erdrich illustrates that those who are not a part of the dominant race, class, or gender, not part of the minority that rules the world, need to know how that world works in order to change it. They need to understand how and why they are systematically excluded and marginalized. Their survival depends on doing more than simply ignoring power relations or resisting them; they must engage in the historical, political, theoretical process of making the significance of
their own experience visible. Once this significance is understood, they can name themselves from their own perspectives, speak for themselves, and insist on their right to participate in naming the terms of their interactions with the dominant culture. In a compelling, accessible, narrative form that marks the transformability of existing social arrangements and the possibility for a different social organization, Erdrich exposes relations among people that are inhuman and thus calls readers to action. Unlike Pauline's version of Fleur's story, which is told for Pauline's benefit alone and which fails to explicate how systematic practices of exploitation work and how they might be changed, Tracks, like Nanapush's version, is cultural critique that calls for change and participation in altering the power relations at the root of social and ecological problems.

Erdrich writes Tracks for people like Lulu, people like my Med-Start students and their families, people who still have ties to the vernacular landscape. She is not writing specifically for academics, although no one is excluded. Her novel is entertaining literature that appeals to kids on the reservation and to college professors, but it should be taken as seriously as academics take theory because it is cultural critique that makes accessible to large audiences of people some complex ideas about the connections between history, politics, economics, culture, and the environment. Erdrich writes in a language that makes us laugh and care and begin to see how these concepts operate in our lives. Just as if we were at a storytelling session, she calls us into the interpretive process, inviting us to explore other ways of knowing, other modes of theorizing, and to participate in building alternate visions of the world.

Practicing Local Pedagogy

Nanapush's insistence that transformative change requires an understanding of both the vernacular and official landscapes suggests the reasons why we must eschew academicism for the sake of academicism or theory for the sake of theory and learn to map shared connections between literature and local peoples and places. The official landscape is built on the notion that progress is inevitable, that we must shut the door on the vernacular landscape and move relentlessly forward. But Nanapush contests this notion by practicing what might be thought of as a local pedagogy, which swings open the door between vernacular and official landscapes, allowing Lulu (who represents the community) to move back and forth between both places, searching for the tools and theories she needs to answer urgent questions that face her community. She cannot simply dismiss dominant culture because it structures the social-material relations in which all parties are forced to participate, but she can use what she learns in both landscapes to improve the condition of her people and to contest authoritarian and discriminatory practices.

If our goal as writers, teachers, and scholars is to move away from a valorizing academicism and teach readers, students, and community members how to read themselves and the world critically, with the goal of changing both, then we need to know who is sitting in our classrooms and enough about the local landscapes we inhabit to render both the vernacular and official problematic as well as comprehensible. We must transform the social and natural world outside the classroom into the subject matter of education. We might think of our classrooms as something of a middle place or door between landscapes, where students move back and forth, honing the tools and critical theories they will need to work for a more socially and environmentally liveable world.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Med-Start students are often in touch with knowledges and forces that fall outside their instructors' knowledge and academic specializations. In discussions focused on a novel such as Tracks and aimed at making connections between literature and their own communities and their future professions in the medical arts, it becomes very clear how describing the significance of each student's cultural and historical experiences gives us more and better tools to build alternative visions of the future. For example, in a discussion of Nanapush's use of story and song to heal Fleur, a Dine student might point out that unlike Western medicine, which treats the symptom, traditional songs and ceremonies are aimed at healing the whole person, body and spirit. An Anglo student might call our attention to the considerable contributions that Western science and technology have made in improving our lives, adding that a diabetic patient experiencing kidney failure will most likely die without dialysis even if that person is given a traditional Dine healing ceremony. A Tohono O'odham student might observe that experiments with traditional foods such as mesquite-bean flour are being conducted to see if diet might help prevent adult-onset diabetes. A Mexican/Yaqui student
might suggest that the doctor she is shadowing at the University Medical Center should know more about the kinds of herbs her grandmother, a traditional medicine woman or curandera, successfully uses to treat various illnesses suffered by members of her community. These students might then write essays discussing the great potential that lies in combining elements of traditional healing practices with elements of Western medical practices.

In these discussions, the classroom becomes a place where students discover shared situations (diabetes, for example, is a disease that affects all races). The official university landscape becomes a more welcoming place where students not only tap into thousands of years of Western culture and technology, but where they bring their own valuable knowledges and make important contributions. What students discover is that where we are located in the social structure as a whole does affect how we understand the world. But finding common ground is possible. By mapping the local and theorizing our various experiences, we can come to understand how we are similar (not the same) and how we are different, which social and environmental issues we share, and which issues affect different groups differently.

Moreover, taking the issues that a novel such as Track 1 raises into the world students actually inhabit is absolutely crucial to the development of a shared sense of responsibility for the future. A Tohono O'odham student may feel no responsibility for the toxic contamination of the aquifer beneath a Mexican American barrio in South Tucson until he discovers that the same political, economic, and social forces that removed the Tohono O'odham from their floodplain gardens along the Santa Cruz River later forced the removal of Mexican Americans from their barrios along that same river and subsequently placed them at a contaminated locale in an industrial section of Tucson.17 An earnest Anglo student may justifiably and resolutely refuse to assume responsibility for her great-great-grandfather's relation to the removal of American Indians to reservations only a fraction of the size of their former territories or to the forced removal of Indian children to government boarding schools. However, she will be hard-pressed to abjure all responsibility for the cultural politics that give the dominant culture the power to deplete aquifers to keep her campus mall green, and she will have a difficult time accounting for the large-scale forces that still contribute to an underrepresentation of the Tohono O'odham at the Uni-
Rock, located near the base of Black Mesa, and with other former students in my freshman composition courses. I also base my discussion of the mine’s effects on Black Mesa community members’ health on an interview conducted on 12 February 1999 with Carl Esitty, a Black Mesa resident who recently graduated from the University of Arizona with a master’s degree in environmental science. All Esitty’s brothers work at the mine, and as a Peabody scholarship recipient, he has worked for Peabody, testing groundwater in the area for toxicity levels.

4. Abbey, Desert Solitaire, 42.
8. Simon Ortiz, introduction to Woven Stone, 188. All Ortiz quotes in this chapter are from Woven Stone, a University of Arizona Press reprint of Ortiz’s Going for the Rain, A Good Journey, and Fight Back.
10. For a discussion of indigenous Kayapo people and their use of fire in the Amazon rain forest, see Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, The Fate of the Forest. In “Whose Nature?” James Proctor observes that the Pacific Northwest “was shaped to some extent by the land-use practices of Native Americans long before Europeans arrived; for example, their common practice of burning grasslands often prevented incursion of the forest into the river valley floors” (276). In “Human Impacts on Arizona Grasslands,” Conrad Bahre notes that “The accidental or intentional commencing of fire to the grasslands by Amerindians—through fire drives, mesquite burning, smoke signals, abandoned campfires, fire during warfare, and so forth—may have contributed to the largely brush-free state of the grasslands when the first Europeans arrived” (243–35).
13. Each culture refers to the place of emergence and the place where they established their village by a different name. In their emergence story, Zuni Pueblo storytellers often refer to the place where they established their first village and where they planted corn for the first time as the “Middle Place” (see Dennis Tedlock, trans., “The Beginning,” in Finding the Center, 275–98). According to Simon Ortiz, the Acoma refer to the place where they established themselves on a high mesa, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in North America, as “Which Is Prepared,” see Woven Stone, 338.


Simon Ortiz’s Fight Back: Environmental Justice, Transformative Ecocriticism, and the Middle Place

1. See “Black Mesa Decision.”
3. Simon Ortiz, introduction to Woven Stone, 31. All quotations from Ortiz in this chapter are from Woven Stone.
4. Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?” 175.
7. For discussion of place as “space humanized,” see Edward Relph’s Place and Placelessness and Yio Fu Tuan’s Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience.
11. This is Benjamin Chavis’s definition, quoted in Giovanni Di Chiro, “Nature as Community,” 304. For more about the three incidents of environmental racism I discuss, see Di Chiro, “Nature as Community,” 305–9, and Harvey, Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference, 359–71.

Cultural Critique and Local Pedagogy: A Reading of Louise Erdrich’s Tracks

1. The Med-Start Program—which works to increase the number of minority and economically disadvantaged students in medical schools and, ultimately, the number of health professionals on reservations and in rural areas of Arizona—has been sponsored by the University of Arizona’s College of Medicine for close to thirty years. I supervised the composition instructors and writing tutors for this program from 1990 to 1997. During those years, some of the writers who accepted invitations to speak to Med-Start students as part of the English Department’s annual Summer Multicultural Writers Series (in addi-
tion to those already mentioned) included Ai, Gloria Bird, Pat Mora, Denise Chávez, Louis Owens, Janice Gould, Greg Sarris, Luci Tapahonso, and Demetria Martinez.

2. See John Brinkerhoff Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape.
3. See Eric Zencey’s discussion of cosmopolitanism and the role that “rootless professors” play in educating us away from place in Virgin Forest, 60–71.
8. Interview with Laura Coltell, in Winged Words, 47.
9. The Chippewa are also called the Ojibwa but are more correctly called Anishinabe, which is a collective name referring to those who speak the same woodland language. See Gerald Vizenor, The People Named the Chippewas, 13.
In this chapter, I use Chippewa because that is the term Erdrich uses in Tracks.
12. Louise Erdrich, Tracks, 18.
17. I discuss and document the experience of Tucson’s Mexican American communities with toxic contamination of the aquifer at more length in the conclusion of this book.

And the Ground Spoke: Joy Harjo and the Struggle for a Land-Based Language

2. See Kirk Kickingbird and Lynn Kickingbird’s “A Short History of Indian Education” (Parts I and II).
3. Simon Ortiz, reading for “Poetics and Politics,” 7. Ortiz made the statement quoted here in a seminar conducted by Larry Evers and Ofelia Zepeda at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. I am quoting from the as yet unpublished and unedited transcript.
5. Ibid.
11. Joy Harjo, seminar discussion for “Poetics and Politics,” 11. Harjo made the statement quoted here in a seminar conducted by Larry Evers and Ofelia Zepeda at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. I am quoting from the as yet unpublished and unedited transcript.
17. Harjo and Gloria Bird titled their 1997 anthology of contemporary Native women’s writing Reinventing the Enemy’s Language.
19. Joy Harjo, “We Must Call a Meeting,” in In Mad Love and War, 9.

A Place to See: Self-Representation and Resistance in Leslie Marmon Silko’s Almanac of the Dead

1. From an interview with Rigoberta Menchú in Ronald Wright’s Stolen Continents: The Americas Through Indian Eyes Since 1492, 272.
2. In Spanish, the rebels call themselves the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional.
4. For more on an ongoing history of rebellion against European conquerors