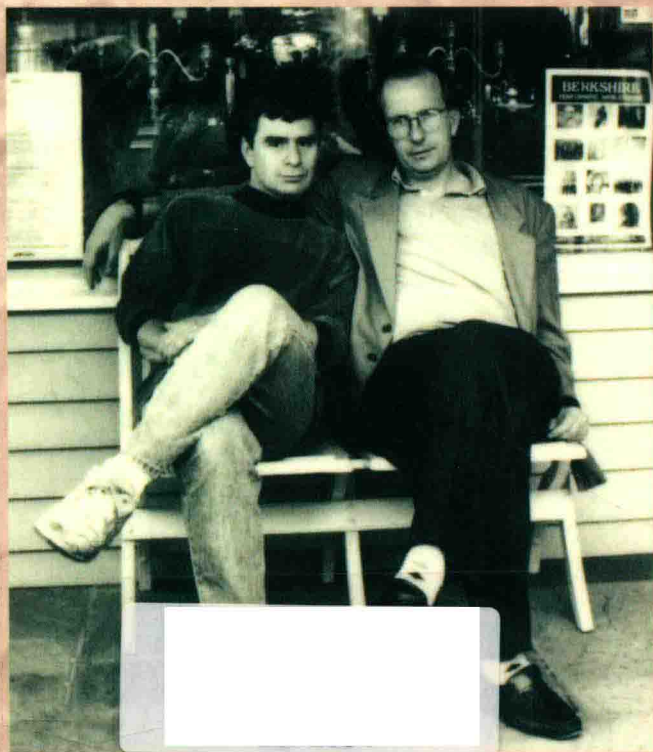


ACADEMIC OUTLAWS

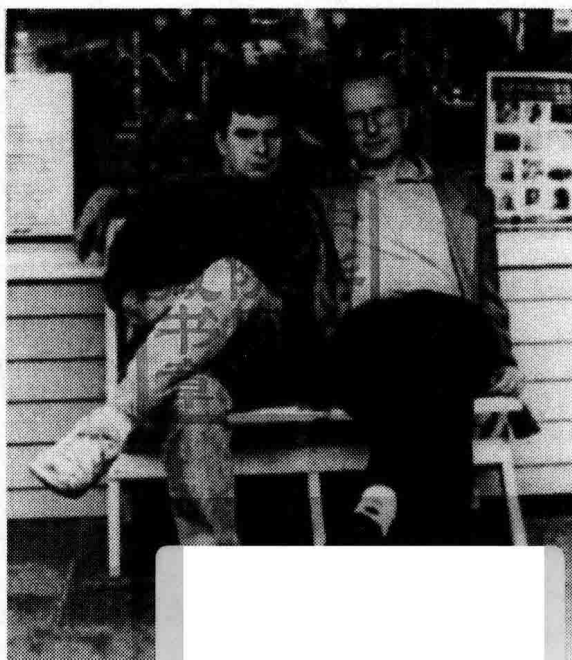
*Queer Theory and Cultural Studies
in the Academy*



William G. Tierney

ACADEMIC OUTLAWS

*Queer Theory and Cultural Studies
in the Academy*



William G. Tierney



SAGE Publications

International Educational and Professional Publisher
Thousand Oaks London New Delhi

Copyright © 1997 by Sage Publications, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information address:



SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Olivers Yard, 55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B-42 Panchsheel Enclave
PO Box 4109
New Delhi 110 017

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tierney, William G.

Academic outlaws : queer theory and cultural studies in the
academy / Author, William G. Tierney.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7619-0682-7 (cloth : acid-free paper). — ISBN
0-7619-0683-5 (pbk. : acid-free paper)

1. Gay and lesbian studies. 2. Culture—Study and teaching
(Higher) 3. Gay teachers. 4. Gays—Identity. I. Title.

HQ75.15.T54 1997

306.76'6'071—dc21

96-45823

97 98 99 00 01 02 03 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Acquiring Editor:	C. Terry Hendrix
Editorial Assistant:	Dale Grenfell
Production Editor:	Sherrise M. Purdum
Production Assistant:	Denise Santoyo
Typesetter/Designer:	Tina Hill
Cover Designer:	Ravi Balasuriya

ACADEMIC OUTLAWS

More Praise for *Academic Outlaws* . . .

“William G. Tierney is a practicing *outlaw*, crisscrossing the horizon where cultural studies meets the academy. One of our premier critics of higher education, Tierney reveals how cultural distinctions shape our relation to key dimensions of everyday life: sexuality, ethnicity, gender, and social class. *Academic Outlaws* works at the intersections of cultural studies and queer theory by forcing us to reflect on how authors/readers reflect and interact with one another in the construction of a text. The book has a theoretical sophistication and elegance of style that is rare in academic writing. A thought-provoking work that is as courageous as it is provocative.”

—Peter McLaren, Professor of Education
and Cultural Studies, UCLA

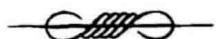
“Simultaneously autobiographical, fictional, and theoretical, this powerful and accessible exposition is essential reading for all interested in cultural studies and politics.”

—William F. Pinar,
St. Bernard Parish Alumni Endowed Professor,
Louisiana State University

“William G. Tierney provides a provocative contemporary look into queer scholarship and queer scholars. There is certainly a need for this book as many academic units are currently struggling with issues on the role of gay and lesbian scholars and scholarship in their respective disciplines. The book should definitely make a significant contribution to the field of gay and lesbian studies.”

—Larry D. Icard, School of Social Work,
University of Washington, Seattle

*For Barry Weiss, without whose love
and friendship I would have
completed this six months sooner.*



Introduction

Setting the Record "Straight"

Readers approach scholarly texts in manifold ways. Some individuals first check the table of contents to gain an idea of what is in the text. Readers who are faculty members often turn to the bibliography to see which authors and books have been cited and, frequently, to determine if the author has cited them. Acknowledgments increasingly provide the reader with a sense of who the author's friends are and whether those friends are among the academic cognoscenti. As Henry Giroux (1993) notes, "Acknowledgments have become the new markers indicating webs of association that place one in the pantheon of 'respected' company" (p. xi). For example, to cite Camille Paglia presumably provides the reader with one insight, while acknowledging that Cornel West is a "true friend" (hooks, 1990) tells us something else. The reader needs to know the likes of West and Paglia, but often the invocation of such names on the acknowledgments page presumes such knowledge in much the same way that a baseball aficionado is supposed to nod in understanding when a rookie pitcher says he grew up in awe of Tom Seaver or Sandy Koufax.

Dedications are a different matter. A dedication most often humanizes the author and lets the reader know that the individual is a member of the human family. "The thoughts expressed in this book," writes John Guillory (1993), "represent my part in an ongoing conversation with Jennifer Wicke. For that conversation and so much else, I will always be grateful. This book is for her" (p. xv). Vincent Crapanzano (1992) simply says, "For

Jane Kramer" on one page and at the end of his acknowledgments adds, "To my daughter, Wicky, and my wife, Jane Kramer, I owe my greatest thanks, for they have had to live with me as I wrote and propounded" (p. viii). Comments like these tell us a great deal. The author is often married and frequently has children, and the spouse and family members have sacrificed for the author; the author appreciates the support to such an extent that the book is dedicated to the individual's wife or husband and often includes the children. Sometimes an author's parents receive kind words, but most often we read about the individual's immediate family. Implicit in the dedication are two points: We learn not only that the author is a human being but also that the individual makes an implicit claim of heterosexuality.

Such knowledge, however, is so commonsensical, so matter-of-fact, that it most often is hidden from us. We do not explicitly pause over a dedication and think, "Gee, Crapanzano is straight. That's interesting." An orthodoxy exists with dedications that enables the reader to continue reading; the names may change, but the structure is set. The dedication may have a tone that is humorous or serious, touching or bland, but underneath the commentary is what I will define in this text as "heterosexual privilege" (Harbeck, 1992, p. 132). When someone dedicates a text to one's husband or wife, we usually do not pause. The narrative portrait we have created for our authors may not be a specific picture of an individual, but as with societal portraits, such images contain certain characteristics; heterosexuality is one of them. However, in a text such as this one where the male author not only dedicates the book to a man but also mentions the love between those two persons, the reader pauses and any number of comments become plausible. "Huh, he's gay," one reader might think, and another one, "How inappropriate!" A third might be unsure why one's sexual orientation needs to be brought up in this fashion, and a fourth reader may simply stop and ponder the revelation. My assumption is that very few readers will read a gay dedication in the same manner as they read a heterosexual one.

To be sure, same-sex dedications are possible that will not raise the issue of one's sexual orientation. T. S. Eliot, for example, dedicated *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound, and Melville dedicated a text to Hawthorne. However, love was not mentioned. The point is that the dedication of a text between two men or two women in a manner that is commonplace for a man and a woman becomes an explicit political and social act, whereas we most often do not think of all other forms of dedications in such a way.

What alternatives exist and what are the implications for an author and the reader?

To Dedicate or Not to Dedicate: The Politics of Invisibility. Until recently, the overwhelming response by homosexual authors has been to avoid marking oneself as gay or lesbian. Dedications might have been oblique—"to RK"—or consciously studious: "I'd like to thank my colleagues in the department." The consequences of such omissions are multiple for the reader. Again, heterosexual readers may think nothing in particular; although it is true that the reader may not have a family like the rest of us, one does not pause over any explicit revelation. Readers still assume the author is heterosexual. The image that readers have in their heads has not been disturbed. Some individuals may think that the author believes that any personal characteristics of a writer should be bracketed because a text should be a purely intellectual undertaking. In this light, a sharp distinction has been made between the life of the mind and one's daily life. With whom one sleeps is irrelevant.

Much as all authors are not heterosexual, all readers are not either. The lesbian or gay reader also learns lessons from such dedications. Just as George Chauncey (1994) has pointed out that gay men in the early 20th century in New York looked for physical manifestations in other men to discover if they were gay, gay and lesbian academics also look for clues about the nature of one's colleagues. A gay or lesbian reader, then, might assume that a dedication to RK is a dedication to the author's lover. The response, again, may be manifold. One gay reader may enjoy knowing a secret that others do not; a second reader may think that even the use of initials is bold; a third might consider the use of initials cowardly or evasive. One overriding lesson learned is that the disclosure of one's sexual identity would be a mistake. Some gay readers may think that it is inappropriate to reveal one's sexual identity in a scholarly text, but the vast majority of individuals will point out that it would be foolhardy and professionally suicidal. Thirty years ago the revelation of such a fact in a book's dedication would have had ramifications for an author well beyond the worth of his or her text. The simple phrase "To my friend and lover, Barry Weiss" would have been grounds for ostracizing or dismissing the author at the vast majority of colleges and universities.

Thus, the avoidance of a gay dedication may seem to sidestep a difficult circumstance in someone's life, but when it is framed within the scope of all other academic texts and academic life, what such avoidance accom-

plishes is to render not only the author but all other gay and lesbian academics invisible. We learn that it is important to keep one's sexual orientation—if one is homosexual—a secret in our professional lives. How is someone's personal life compromised if the most important individual in the author's life must be an absent figure or reduced to initials? What does it say about the definition and parameters of the academic community if an individual's longtime companion is rendered invisible in the text? Thus, heterosexual authors can combine their professional and personal personae whereas lesbian and gay authors have to keep their professional personae distinct from their private lives. What are the consequences?

Similarly, it is also plausible that a naive reader may think nothing at all about a male author's dedication to a man. The reader reinforces heterosexism by assuming, perhaps, that the two men are brothers, cousins, or close friends. Although the author and the individual to whom the book is dedicated will have a different last name, the idea of homosexuality is so distant from the reader that the author's sexual orientation is nonexistent; in effect, heterosexuality is such a structured norm that any other possibility is inconceivable.

Dedication and Rejection: A Personal Response. Increasingly over the past decade, gay and lesbian academics have revealed their sexual orientation to their colleagues and readers, although the vast majority of gay academe remains closeted and invisible. Gay or lesbian authors who have decided to dedicate a text to their partners vary from their heterosexual counterparts in significant ways. The gay author has made an explicit decision that may have taken up a great amount of thought, whereas the heterosexual writer may spend no more than what it takes to write the dedication thinking about what to inscribe.

Many heterosexual authors, of course, may care a great deal about those to whom they dedicate their text—a dying relative, an inspirational colleague, a cherished spouse. And yet the thought that goes into such a dedication is entirely different from that of the lesbian or gay author who makes an explicitly gay reference to that same dying relative, inspirational colleague or cherished partner. To say that you are gay or lesbian is inescapably an explicitly political act in the late 20th century. What we often do not realize is that if the comment is political, then logically the absence of the comment is equally political. We either disturb the image in the reader's mind, or we reinforce it. Second, the author's comment is often a conscious public affirmation of his or her identity. The implicit nature of

the heterosexual dedication is a public affirmation, but it usually is not conscious. Ironically, a conscious heterosexual dedication often is used by a closeted individual who hopes to hide his or her sexual orientation.

One response of heterosexist readers to such a dedication is personal: They want nothing to do with anything homosexual; or rather, they want nothing to do with anything explicitly homosexual. Obviously, if the author had hidden his or her identity, the reader would have read the text and the text still would have been written by a gay or lesbian individual. The problem for the reader is that the author proclaimed his or her sexual orientation. If an individual has been raised in a fundamentalist religion, for example, or has grown up in a socially conservative family, then merely the realization that someone is gay or lesbian would be grounds for rejection. What is interesting in this response is the inability of the reader to distinguish a writer's background from the work that he or she does. In a curious way, then, the rejection on a personal level highlights what closeted academics most fear: Their ideas are discarded out of hand not because of what they have said but because of who they are. If a reader were to put down a book before turning to page one of Chapter 1, the message transmitted is that one's background counts. In effect, the closeted author has correctly read the audience. At a minimum, for the heterosexist reader the structured heterosexist image changes; the hand that wrote the text, the mind that developed the ideas, belongs to a homosexual.

The lesbian or gay reader will also have personal responses, but curiously, they will be simultaneously self-referential and external. On the one hand, if the reader is closeted, she or he may be forced to consider why this particular author could, or would, come out. On the other hand, the reader will look for clues in the response of other readers about the safety of coming out. The heterosexual readers who reject such a dedication confirm the gay reader's fears.

Conversely, as I discuss below, the straight reader who has lesbian or gay friends or family and has thought about bias and heterosexism offers a different reading and commentary. My point here is that the context for the gay reader is decidedly different from that of the heterosexual. Straight readers who take offense neither need to question themselves nor look to others for their response. Such a dedication is wrong because it states something that is immoral in the belief system of the heterosexist reader.

Dedication and Rejection: An Intellectual Response. Some readers may cloak their response in the guise of the disengaged intellectual. One's sexual

orientation, assumes a proponent of this stance, should have nothing to do with the work under investigation. To disclose personal aspects of one's life is at least unnecessary and at worst, politically charged and potentially damaging. If the writer feels compelled to tell us about his or her personal life, goes this line of thought, how might the text itself be compromised to fit the author's personal agenda? The answer is often in the question itself, for why ought one to bother reading a text that appears jaded from the outset?

Individuals who speak from this perspective often have personal beliefs akin to those heterosexual readers in the first category, but they may also accept basic notions of science framed from a positivist perspective. In this light, the role of the intellectual is to advance knowledge from a disinterested perspective in an empirical manner. Ideas such as objectivity and external validity, reliability and the traditions of Durkheim and Comte argue that the scientist conducts work that ought to matter little whether one is male or female, French or German, gay or straight. When the scientist enters the laboratory, she or he leaves personal characteristics behind. The scientist tests hypotheses that ultimately may be generalized. Thus, any individual who chooses to mention such information as sexual orientation in any text raises serious doubts about the trustworthiness of his or her data.

The concerns of these readers are twofold. On the one hand, the mathematician who says he is gay at the front of a mathematical treatise seems to use objective data to advance a personal agenda. In effect, the reader is suggesting that the author keep his personal politics out of the equation. Even more harmfully, the sociologist who writes that she is "a lesbian in a committed relationship" in a text about deviance, could inadvertently imply to her readers that she may have skewed her data to further her political beliefs. According to this line of reasoning, at a minimum the data are compromised and questionable, and, at worst, the author has been self-serving and unethical. In either case, the reader rejects the text because the author is biased or does not want a distorted account of a particular scientific investigation, or both.

An analysis of this response reveals the norms that the reader believes exist. The invoking of heterosexual privilege assumes that the heterosexual married individual has no personal agenda when one's spouse appears in a scientific text. Presumably, that we learn an individual has been happily married for twenty years at the start of a book about homosexuality and deviance also has no implications. The concern raised here, however, is precisely such a differentiation: The reader is unable to distinguish that

whatever one's sexual orientation, proclaiming that one is gay or straight makes similar points. To accept such an analysis, however, brings some of the most fundamental assumptions about the scientific method into question. If any author who offers a dedication to a spouse is either framing societal norms or approaching a research topic from a particular subjective position, or both, then at a minimum we must bring into question, if not reject, notions such as objectivity and reliability. Curiously, the intellectual rejection of such a dedication, then, does little to disturb the mental imagery of the heterosexual reader. The reader's stance is that she or he is not concerned with the author's background, but at the same time, the author's lesbian background is precisely why the text has a greater likelihood of being discarded than if it were written by a straight author who begins with a dedication to her husband.

The lesbian or gay reader may have a similar response. As there are feminists who subscribe to a feminism that rejects notions of traditional science because they are patriarchal, there are also feminists who consider themselves positivists. From this perspective, feminism concerns equal rights but it does not necessarily bring into question the scientific method. Similarly, there are gay and lesbian researchers who assume that their sexual orientation should play no role in their research. They, too, may wonder about the necessity of proclaiming one's sexual orientation. One difference, however, is that most lesbian and gay readers who make this claim will also be aware of their mental imagery. Because they are different, they realize the meanings and consequences of straight and gay dedications. Nevertheless, they hold to notions of distancing objectivity and may intellectually reject any perceived or intended authorial bias.

In many respects, the logic of this position is stretched to the limit in literary texts. Those who reject the so-called flaunting of one's sexual orientation readily agree that to understand T. S. Eliot, for example, we must examine his conversion to Catholicism, or to comprehend the work of Richard Wright we should know that he was African American. And yet the sexual orientation of Henry James, Walt Whitman, or Willa Cather often escapes scrutiny because such information is presumably irrelevant. One wonders by what stretch of the literary imagination the race or religion of an individual is important, but sexual orientation is not?

Dedication and Acceptance: The Personal Liberal. As increasing numbers of gay and lesbian academics and individuals beyond the academy come out of the closet, more heterosexual individuals learn that a relative, friend

or colleague is gay or lesbian. When they read a text and discover that the author has dedicated the book to a same-sex partner, the response may be of mild acceptance. This group of individuals holds to dualistic thinking. On the one hand, they are not disturbed that someone should dedicate a book to her or his longtime companion. The attitude is one of both, "Who cares?" and, "That's nice." On the other hand, the easy assumption that it does not matter who receives the dedication in a book leaves unquestioned the political implications of a basic mental imagery with which we construct social, cultural and academic relations. The reader will still gloss over a dedication "To my loving wife" without pause but will stop to acknowledge the male writer's tribute "To Bob."

This form of response goes one step beyond the reader who reads a homosexual dedication but thinks nothing of it. That individual's mental imagery is so structured that lesbian and gay people are invisible even when there is evidence to the contrary. Liberal readers acknowledge that homosexuality exists and that homosexuals should not be persecuted but have accepted the idea that sexual orientation is relatively unimportant. Readers may also acknowledge that someone is Latino/Latina, Protestant or Pakistani; what matters, however, is the text. One's experiences and background are not incorporated into a reordering of the inherent structure of identity that exists. The reader does not acknowledge that a structure exists; we are autonomous individuals and our autonomy should be celebrated.

Gay and lesbian readers' responses are helpful here because even before they open the text, they have been forced to consider the mental imagery of sexual orientation. In the late 20th century, it is nearly impossible for even the extremely closeted queer academic not to know other lesbian and gay individuals. Consequently, a dedication for this group is an affirmation of the structure they have created for themselves: There are straight authors and queer authors. However, the explicit comment is also a personal affirmation. The gay liberal hope is that the day will come when one's sexual orientation is irrelevant and lesbian and gay people may offer dedications without fear or recrimination and in the same manner as their heterosexual counterparts.

Dedication and Acceptance: The Critical Intellectual. The reader who accepts a gay dedication from what I will call a "critical intellectual" standpoint rejects the stance of the positivist and also moves beyond the personal acceptance of the liberal. Critical intellectuals realize something is up when they read a queer dedication. The scientific method already will have been brought into question by this individual, and, in consequence,

the implicit structures that readers have in their minds will be questioned. When the individual reads the female author's comment about "the support received from my friend and lover, Beth," the response goes beyond mere acceptance. From this perspective, if we think that such a dedication is political, we also bring into question those dedications that previously have not been seen as political (i.e., heterosexual ones).

Similarly, the male math professor has every right to dedicate a text to a spouse or a partner and both comments are equally political/nonpolitical. The female sociologist who is lesbian or straight and studies deviance exists in a political web from which she cannot extract herself. Gay or straight novelists create fiction in historical and social contexts where their sexuality inevitably influences the text. The challenge for any researcher or reader is to develop standards of trustworthiness that will be quite distinct from positivism's beliefs about objectivity or literary criticism's modernist assumptions about how to read a text. As McLaren (1989) has noted, the critical intellectual's task is partly in developing a language of representation and hope that enables those of us on the margins to "speak outside the terms and frames of reference provided by the colonizer" (p. 52). Thus, rather than merely proclaiming a gay dedication to be "nice" or "innocuous," the reader's categories are disrupted as they undoubtedly have been in other areas of their lives.

Oddly, the gay reader may stand in sharpest contrast to his or her counterpart who accepts a gay dedication from a personal perspective. The gay critical intellectual may think that a dedication that enables lesbian and gay people to be accepted like everyone else is an assimilationist strategy that is fundamentally flawed. The point is not assimilation; such acceptance has never worked for us or other colonized peoples such as Native Americans in the United States. The gay critical intellectual seeks to reframe the structural categories. An individual's ability to dedicate a book to his or her partner is not merely nice; it is essential if the underlying cultural and societal norms are to be brought into question, challenged, and ultimately overthrown.

Queer Theory and Cultural Studies

I began this text on a Monday in September, 1994, framed by an odd confluence of events. Barry's birthday was the day before, Sunday, September 25th, and it was also a day in Los Angeles when 30,000 people had

participated in an AIDS Walk to raise money for AIDS. We had arrived in Los Angeles the previous month because I had accepted a faculty position at the University of Southern California (USC). Barry, my partner for the past decade, accompanied me with the expectation that he would find employment in his field of computer science. Indeed, part of the bargaining that took place to get me here was the Dean's willingness to help Barry find employment. Like the fictional institution I will discuss in Chapter 6, USC has no domestic partners' agreement that enables me to cover Barry on my health insurance policy if we so choose. Although both in excellent health, as we walked that Sunday, we were reminded once again of the kind of chaos and tragedy that can befall individuals who are sick, not simply because they are ill but because medical benefits for lesbian and gay partners are nonexistent; we live in a society where adequate health care is a privilege, not a right.

This text, then, is about the reframing of the university. It is about nonexistent medical benefits and a research enterprise that has studiously avoided studies of lesbian and gay people. It is about the dedication of books by authors to their long-time companions and the invisibility of lesbian and gay academics. At first glance it may appear self-indulgent to have gone on at length about the dedication of a text to the fellow whom I have loved and lived with for the past decade. Yet a goal of this book is to outline how the lives we live and the matter of with whom we live help determine what counts for knowledge, which in turn becomes tied to institutional policies and framed as parameters of power.

I argue here that the manner in which we have constructed gay identity in research has helped frame the way lesbian and gay people get defined in the daily life of the university. Conversely, societal constructions of homosexuality also influence the ontological parameters of one's research. To argue in this manner rejects the notion that we are able to conduct research in the pristine conditions of the laboratory, or to believe that the university itself is an ivory tower removed from the daily life of society.

The idea of the advancement of knowledge is a central purpose of the university. When one teaches doctoral candidates about how to conduct research, or when undergraduate students partake of general education courses, they engage in the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge. From this vantage point individuals enter the institution without much knowledge and they learn facts and ideas; to use Paulo Freire's (1970) well-worn phrase, such an idea is a "banking concept of education" (p. 58).

Students pay to get something, and the payment is wisdom; at times, the dividend is also a job. Thus, teaching is one primary area of the university where knowledge advances. Obviously, the idea itself does not advance—as if it is an autonomous agent marching down an intellectual avenue; instead, an individual's understanding of the idea increases. The distinction is important if we are to decode and come to terms with how knowledge gets created and advanced.

The advancement of knowledge—rather than the individual's understanding of knowledge—primarily occurs through the work of the faculty in their laboratories and studies. Research has become the *raison d'être* of faculty life in the late 20th century. No more direct example exists of an individual advancing knowledge than that of the scientist in a laboratory struggling to gain insights about a phenomenon. The reward system, promotion and tenure, institutional totems such as academic freedom, all revolve around the ability of the professorate to advance thought and create intellectual breakthroughs in a particular area of inquiry. Such developments become known through academic representations of the intellect: journals, professional conferences, scholarly books, and, to an increasing degree, film and other multimedia approaches.

When we speak of the advancement of knowledge and use the academy as the vehicle to move forward, two unstated assumptions take place. First, we assume that knowledge advances. Such an assumption is based on modernist notions of progress. The researcher knows more today than yesterday. Knowledge is accretionary. Second, knowledge production is an intellectual activity that is best discussed with like-minded peers. The judges and arbiters of whether one has actually advanced knowledge are those individuals who have become leaders in the creation and maintenance of a particular field of study. The consequence is that in large part other audiences are excluded from debates about whether a particular idea has merit. Students acquire knowledge, but because they do not have the requisite skills to begin with, they most often are not deemed worthy of knowing anything about a particular topic. The common citizenry often is deemed to know even less than the students. The result is a portrait of the university faculty as an intellectual vanguard who protect and advance an understanding of the world. Others may try to grapple with ideas, but their own particular backgrounds and social contexts are not equal to the task.

Throughout this text, I take issue with these assumptions and I elaborate an alternative way of reading—and acting—in academe. I argue