The Object in the Life of Intellectuals and Artists

[Author's note: much of the criticism, in this essay, of the culture that has grown up around the need for a writer or intellectual to be published, is rapidly becoming irrelevant thanks to the Internet, which enables every person who can afford the equipment, to reach a world-wide audience on his or her own, thus saving the enormous amount of time he or she had to spend in the past in finding publishers.]

Artists and Intellectuals as Members of the Bourgeoisie

"The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every activity hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has transformed the doctor, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-laborers." — Karl Marx, quoted in Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1982, p. 115.

"Why does Marx place that halo on the heads of modern professionals and intellectuals in the first place? To bring out one of the paradoxes of their historical role: even though they tend to pride themselves on their emancipated and thoroughly secular minds, they turn out to be just about the only moderns who really believe they are called to their vocations and that their work is holy." — ibid., p. 116.

"They may deny [that they are 'paid wage-laborers' of the bourgeoisie] — after all, who wants to belong to the proletariat? — but they are thrown into the working class by the historically defined conditions under which they are forced to work. When Marx describes intellectuals as wage earners, he is trying to make us see modern culture as part of modern industry. Art, physical science, social theory like Marx's own, all are modes of production; the bourgeoisie controls the means of production in culture, as in everything else, and anyone who wants to create must work in the orbit of its power.— ibid.

"Thus [modern professionals, intellectuals and artists] can write books, paint pictures, discover physical or historical laws, save lives, only if someone with capital will pay them. But the pressures of bourgeois society are such that no one will pay them unless it pays to pay them — that is, unless their works somehow help to 'increase capital'. They must 'sell themselves piecemeal' to an employer willing to exploit their brains for profit. They must scheme and hustle to present themselves in a maximally profitable light; they must compete (often brutally and unscrupulously) for the privilege of being bought, simply in order to go on with their work. Once the work is done they are, like all other workers, separated from the products of their labor. Their goods and services go on sale, and it is 'the vicissitudes of competition, the fluctuations of the market', rather than any intrinsic truth or beauth or value — or, for that matter, any lack of truth or beauty of value — that will determine their fate." — ibid., p. 117.

"Intellectuals occupy a peculiar position in the working class, one that generates special privileges, but also special ironies. They are beneficiaries of the bourgeois demand for perpetual innovation, which vastly expands the market for their products and skills, often stimulates their creative audacity and imagination, and — if they are shrewd enough and lucky enough to exploit the need for brains — enables them to escape the chronic proverty in which most workers live. On the other hand, because they are personally involved in their work — unlike most wage laborers, who are alienated and indifferent — the fluctuations of the market place strike them in a far deeper way. In 'selling themselves piecemeal', they are selling not merely their physical energy but their minds, their sensibilities, their deepest feelings, their visionary and imaginative powers, virtually the whole of themselves... [Goethe's] Faust...embodied a complex of needs endemic to intellectuals: they are driven not only by the need to live, which they share with all men, but by a

desire to communicate, to engage in dialogue with their fellow men. But the cultural commodity market offers the only media in which dialogue on a public scale can take place: *no idea can reach or change moderns unless it can be marketed and sold to them* [my emphasis]. Hence they turn out to be dependent on the market not for bread alone but for spiritual sustenance — a sustenance they know the market cannot be counted on to provide. —ibid., p. 118.

"Intellectuals must recognize the depths of their own dependence — spiritual as well as economic dependence — on the bourgeois world they despise. It will never be possible to overcome these contradictions unless we confront them directly and openly. This is what stripping away the haloes means." — ibid., p. 119.

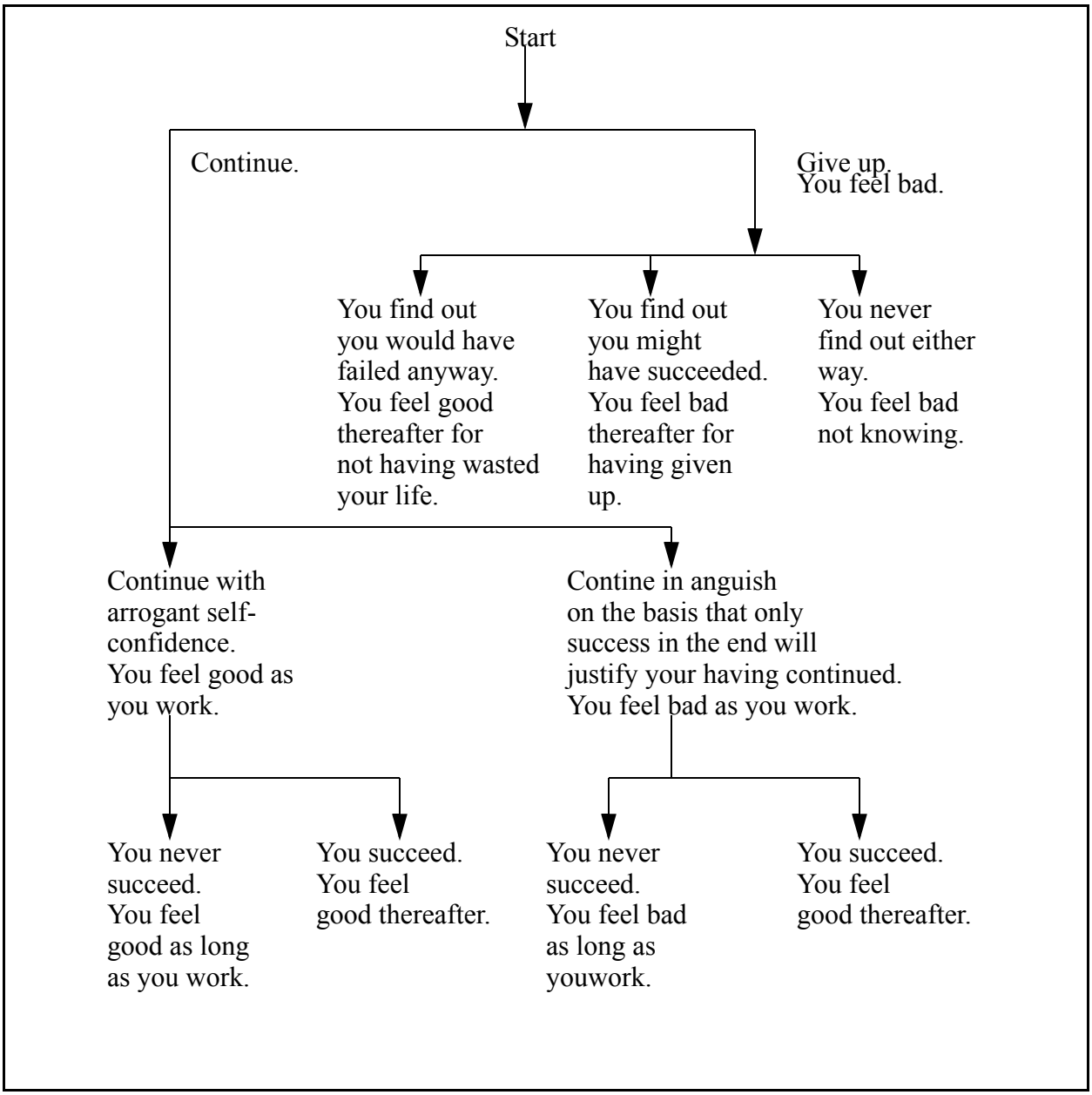
Or, in other words, intellectuals, who have been so good at questioning the morality of others, must now begin questioning their own.

The Morality of Intellectuals and Artists

It is further evidence of the shallowness of Freud as a psychologist that he apparently did not understand why Nietzsche placed such importance on morality — or rather, on the *study* of morality. The morality of intellectuals and artists, by which I mean not their sexual behavior or veracity but their attitudes and behavior concerning their work and their life, is shaped by the forces cited in the Berman quote, above. What is good is to be a producer of valuable Objects — whether commercially valuable objects, e.g., bestsellers, or paintings that are in demand by speculators, or grant-winning, prize-winning research work that enhances the reputation of one's university or industrial department, or work that will be admired by posterity. What is also good is to be a commodity oneself — a person with media value, a good performer on radio or TV. (Hence the appeal of the intellectual and artistic life among many people who feel worthless in society at large: it offers them the possibility of converting worthless thoughts and feelings into valuable commodities.)

This morality, like all moralities, has its own myths to perpetuate itself, e.g., "Early success and/or easy success and/or great success during an intellectual's or artist's life is almost always a sign of shallowness. Those who are shallow will be forgotten. Proof: all those successful intellectuals and artists in the past who are now forgotten." "Great suffering, particularly as a result of being ignored for most or all of one's life and enduring terrible loneliness, is a sign of profundity, hence a sign that one will be immortal. Proof: Van Gogh."

On the other hand, a strictly logical analysis of the question whether the struggling intellectual or artist should continue his struggle, reveals that not only should he, but he should do so with arrogant self-confidence. The argument is most clearly presented in graphic form, as follows:



The argument is simply: there are more "feel good" paths if you continue to work with arrogant self-confidence, than with either of the other two choices. We are, of course, making the outrageous Benthamite assumption that all types of feeling good can be compared, as though there were a basic "feel good" measuring unit.

(Those who study English literature in the universities soon learn that the worst possible thing for a writer to be is: not considered important by professors in later generations, or, even worse, to be remembered as a minor figure, which means, always to be referred to in passing, and with a condescending smile, and only in the classroom. Given this fact, these students are amazed at how many second and third rate authors and poets have nevertheless kept on working. Surely some of them must have known what their fate would be. Why didn't they commit suicide, or at least turn to another kind of work?)

Print as Object-ifyer

For an intellectual, the means by which one converts thoughts and ideas into Objects, is print. As Lewis Mumford said of Rennaisance scholars, "To exist was to exist in print", and the same is true of modern intellectuals. At one of the nation's most prestigious universities, a friend of mine — an independent expert on the use of the computer in education who has more good ideas about education in a month than you will find in the education journals in ten years — has grown accustomed to the standard reply to his proposals from Education Dept. professors: "I'm interested if we can get a paper out of it."

Print is the form of communication that earns one respectability, and that guarantees immortality to the academic, i.e., a permanent niche in the mausoleum, i.e., in the archives. It is the medium that proves that one has produced — and hence is — an Object of value. Students of English literature, for example, soon learn that among history's losers are those who were primarly known for the quality of their conversation (a judgement which puts, e.g., Socrates among the losers); the idea that one person's conversation may have been of far greater value to his contemporaries (and, had proper recording means existed, to posterity as well) than another person's literary output, is an idea the academic mind cannot seriously entertain. Indeed, I am not sure but that some academics — particularly those in the humanities — really believe that print is somehow a necessary constituent of Truth — that an idea, any idea, in manuscript or spoken aloud, does not become "actually True" until it appears in print. A standard datum in the biography of any modern author is the number of words he or she wrote per day; some authors, e.g., Hemingway, felt obliged to keep a record of this proof of their right to be literary persons, because surely it is clear that 500 words a day makes one a better author than the poor bastard who can only turn out 325. The same wacky criterion of merit is still (1989) used in industry, where computer programmers and technical writers are often rated on the number of lines of, respectively, code and text, they produce per day. But perhaps only poets and mathematicians are capable of the outrage which such a bricklayer's — or, rather, bureaucrat's — criterion deserves.

Print as Waste of Time

But as anyone knows who has attempted to do original thinking outside the university, print can be an appallingly inefficient medium of communication. By "print" here I mean not only the medium itself but also the entire process by which word-processor manuscripts are submitted to book publishers or to the editors of magazines and learned journals, the manuscripts are reviewed and then, if deemed acceptable, are computer typeset, the book or magazine or journal is printed, possibly advertised and reviewed in other publications, then, in the case of books and some magazines, sold at bookstores, or, in the case of other magazines and almost all journals, distributed to subscribers. If the manuscript is not deemed acceptable, the process must be repeated; furthermore, simultaneous submission to several journals is not allowed.

The amount of time, money, and energy wasted on this process — which can sometimes take years — is obvious to all those who do not benefit by it.

(Those who enjoy setting up mathematical models might enjoy defining a set of "publishing world" models ranging from one in which everyone is a self-publisher (here, each manuscript receives all the attention each author could wish for, and decisions on manuscripts are instantaneous, but advertising and distribution occupies most of each author's time), to one in which there

are only two or three vast publishing houses (here, the author has no idea what kind of attention, if any, his manuscript will receive, decisions on manuscripts may take a very long time indeed, but the author does not have to worry about advertising and distribution). What is an "optimum" publishing world, from the author's point of view, given the number of authors in the U.S., and is such a world actually possible?)

There are less than a dozen or two experts world-wide in some academic specialties. Pencil and paper and copier are completely adequate to circulate new thoughts and discoveries, and much faster than the academic journals. In fact, in many disciplines, computer networks and newsletters have already begun taking over the function of announcing new results which formerly belonged to academic journals. Publication, in the sciences as well as mathematics, has become a means of registering, of archiving, knowledge which is already known to the researchers in the relevant specialty. Furthermore, a strong case can be made — and I know an author who is in the process of making it — that pencil, paper, and copier provide a far clearer and more efficient means of conveying technical ideas than present-day print technology can. (Consider the ubiquity of the blackboard (or other form of writing board) in academic and industrial research labs.)

Let every intellectual ask him or herself the following questions:

(1) "How much of my time is spent in attempting to put my work in a *form* that editors, publishers will accept?", or, more precisely, "How much of my time is spent on stylistic adjustments, which, in informal communications, I would never bother with since other participants would simply ask for the clarifications they needed — in short, stylistic adjustments whose only purpose is to demonstrate my knowledge of literary good manners to editors and publishers?"

(2) "What percentage of books (articles, stories, poems) submitted 'over the transom' are published? What percentage would not have been read by the editor who recommended publication if the editor had not been approached personally by someone he knew?"

(3) "How much of my time (and money) is spent just on finding likely publishers to submit my mss. to, writing letters to these publishers, making copies of, and mailing, mss.?" (Add up the hours, my friend!)

Many an aspiring author wastes more time on activities connected with getting into print than he does on all his vices combined.

Informal Communication

Such is the prestige of print (in this post-literate age) that most intellectuals — especially academics — have no idea how much of the intellectual life is carried on through what we may call "informal communication", by which I mean, first of all, conversations, arguments, discussions, conducted orally or on paper or via computer network, in which the participants enjoy a certain degree of freedom to make mistakes, raise questions, speculate, write in highly informal styles, even make fools of themselves, without being ostracized from the group (which may be only one other person) with whom they are communicating. Second of all, I mean by "informal communication" the reporting of new results, e.g., in science or mathematics, to a limited audience of interested persons, without any intervening refereeing process, typically via media such as pencil and paper or word-processor, with copies made on a typical office copier, or by computer network memo.

The *prestige* of informal communication is zero, but that does not mean its importance in the intellectual life is zero. No intellectual discipline *lives* on the printed page. It lives in the informal

communications of the community which uses the printed page to summarize and codify its results. So far as I know, no one has attempted to measure the ratio between the number of words that were communicated informally during the course of writing a typical academic paper, with the number in the resulting paper itself, but I am convinced that the ratio would be surprisingly large.

Informal Communication in Mathematics

Consider the least informal discipline of all, namely, mathematics. If you were to make a video tape of a year in the life of a mathematician doing research, you would find him engaging in all manner of informal communication, e.g., conversations with others at the blackboard or while walking. The published paper resulting from his research is not so much an announcement as it is a summary of these informal communications and of the mathematician's private thinking (much of which is informal also).

Precision, formalism, rigor, are not qualities that come into being with print. They are qualities that print codifies.

Informal Communication in Industry

In industry, at least ninety-percent of the important communication is spoken — in meetings, discussions, conversations, whether on the phone or in person. The U.S. did not become the world's leader in technology on the writing skills of its engineers or managers.

Informal Communication and the Teaching of Writing

Lack of awareness among teachers about the importance of informal communication is one reason why the teaching of writing in the primary and secondary schools continues to be an all-but-hopeless task. Ask a high school teacher why students have difficulty in writing well and he or she will tell you that students nowadays don't read, that they have no understanding of grammar, that they don't know how to express themselves, that they don't think clearly. But the real reason is that they never talk about, discuss, argue about the subjects they are supposed to write on. They have no experience in informal communication in these subjects. For them, writing is a bewildering collection of shoulds and shouldn'ts with no conceivable rationale — the typical useless stuff taught in school. Worst of all, it seems to them that all of these shoulds and shouldn'ts are equally important: misspelling a word is as bad as using the wrong verb tense which is as bad as getting your lead sentence (whatever that is) wrong which is as bad as having a poor outline which is as bad as not backing up your argument with quotes from the book. When writing is taught in this way, it amounts to no more than a set of manners: the fork goes on the left, you say "Mr." if the guy is really old.

On the other hand, a student who has learned to discuss and argue about subjects he has some interest in has a far better chance of understanding the value of logic, evidence, summarizing of ideas, and precision of speech. (They are ways of winning arguments.) If he has to listen to a long-winded argument, his natural inclination is to ask for a summary ("the main idea"), and he in turn may be asked for one when he presents an argument. Such a summary is called an outline (or the first stage of one). Doing outlines is a way of learning the all-important difference between the "what" (the outline) and the "how" (the actual sentences used to express the "what") — a dif-

ference that is without question one of the two or three most important things that high schools and colleges should be teaching.

Certainly the following experiment should be made a few times: the teacher temporarily puts aside not only the grammar books but also the books presenting the models of good writing style and instead tries to get his students to argue with him, and with each other, about matters of importance to them, or, failing that, about matters they find least boring. Intially, the arguments may be conducted orally, the number of class minutes afforded to each student depending on the size of the class. Students may argue about rock and roll, sports, TV programs, ads, movies, school politics, public events. For example, the student might argue that rock group *x* is better than any other. The teacher might then ask the student what he means by "better". Or the teacher might propose a question such as the following for discussion: "It is discovered that the manufacture of tapes and records — CD's as well as LP's — produces a certain pollutant which each year kills several thousand people, mainly teenagers and young adults. No alternative manufacturing process is known. Should the manufacture of tapes and records be banned?" In all cases, students would be permitted to make written notes prior to the discussions if they wished.

One additional benefit of this type of activity is that, if the student argues with a person who has a good mastery of spoken and written English, he tends to correct many of his grammatical mistakes and improve his articulation almost without knowing it, simply by example.

Or, in short, "write as you speak" is useless advice if you haven't the opportunity to speak about what you want to write about.

Informal Communication and Learning a Foreign Language

Learning through conversation — i.e., through informal communication — is the way the successful language schools teach a foreign language — and "good writing", like good speaking, is a foreign language to most students — the foreign language of the educated class. Anyone who doubts the fundamental importance of conversation in learning a language should try to to learn one out of books alone. He may use dictionaries, thesauri, grammars, classics, modern works, comics, newspapers, but he may not talk to, or listen to, anyone who speaks the language. Though he may develop a large vocabulary, he will find that he is constantly unsure of *what one says* in each set of circumstances — which words one should choose from among many seemingly equivalent candidates — and this is precisely what one learns in conversation. Putting it in pseudo-mathematical terms, he does not know the "coordinates" of most words and phrases in the "space" of occasions for speech.

Informal Communication and the Humanities

If you question a philosopher about the importance of print in his field, he will reply that papers in modern academic journals are elements of an on-going dialogue. If you remind him that Western philosophy began, and reached one of its highest points, long before the invention of printing, he will often reply that academic journals are simply the modern version of the dialogues of the ancient Greeks. But this is naive to the point of stupidity. No form of communication involving as much formality, refereeing, and *delay* as publishing a paper does, can fairly be called a "dialogue". Dialogues are what take place in offices, on the phone, at conferences between the presentation of papers, in coffee shops, in walks across campus. Anyone who doubts the fundamental difference should perform the following simple experiment. Find a computer with an

interactive program — say, a word-processor or a business program. Typically it will provide a response in less than a second to what the user types. Now ask a programmer to slow these responses to, say, 30 seconds each, making no other changes in the program. You will not then say that the use of the modified program is the same as the original, it just takes longer. Instead, you will start spending a lot of time thinking about and preparing what you want to type in, you will try to anticipate every possible error, because the cost in time of making an error is now so high. Your thought processes, your way of thinking, will change; you will "labor over each word"; the very nature of the communication process — what you say, how you say it, what you deem important, how the process feels to you — will change.

Or consider the common academic activities of interpretation and explication. When the subject is the work of a living author, what is gained by conducting these activities solely in the traditional formats of academic journals? All that any scholar has to do is to write the author in question, or pick up the phone and call him. Why shouldn't it be standard practice for a person whose works are difficult to understand, to participate in occasional tape recorded conversations with other specialists in his field? (These could later be printed, of course.)

Alternatives to the Present State of Affairs

An Alternative for Intellectuals

An alternative to our present obsession with intellectual Objects is, first, the recognition of the importance of informal communication in present intellectual life, and, second, the expansion of it through a revival of conversation, dialogue, and discussion which is free of our present obsession with print.

"... in the lives of intellectuals... it just takes several friends to make the difference; and these friends can meet in a coffeehouse in St. Louis or a bookstore in Seattle. Bohemia can be this small, this vital." — Jacoby, Russell, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, Basic Books, Inc., N.Y., 1987, p. 21.

Suppose, for example, that *instead* of publishing a paper in an academic journal, a philosopher or literary critic would instead present it, at a pre-announced time and place, to an audience of philosophers or critics and, possibly, students. He would present his ideas with any degree of formality or informality he deemed appropriate, i.e., he would not necessarily "deliver a paper": he might merely speak from an outline. At the end of the presentation, his audience would then discuss and argue about his ideas — not in the polite, obsequious way this is so often done (when it is done) at present, but in a way that I can only describe as *attempting to get at the truth*. (Of course, the truth may be that no definite conclusions can be drawn at that time.) Suppose that a sound or video recording were made of the entire event and then sold or distributed (and possibly also transcribed and published).

If this became a common practice, I believe the very nature of philosophy and literary criticism would change, and, I believe, change for the better — "what was said" would change, not merely how it was said. (Consider how our understanding of Hegel's philosophy might be improved, or that philosophy itself changed, if Hegel had done this. Certainly a worthwhile thesis topic for any philosophy student would be to attempt to present Hegel's philosophy, or at least part of it, in the form of a Platonic dialogue.)

"It was part of [Diderot's] theory of knowledge, repudiating the mighty Descartes, that truth emerges in the flash and friction of conversation, typically around a dinner table, rather than in the detached soul of a solitary thinker sitting by a stove and interrogating his own mind. At least in

the realm of natural philosophy and metaphysics, truth is a social construction. His image of intelligence is not Rodin's *Penseur*, but rather the fluid and variegated outlines of the figures in Raphael's *School of Athens*." — Hampshire, Stuart, "The Last Charmer", review of Burbank, P. N., *Diderot: A Critical Biography* and *'This Is Not a Story' and Other Stories by Denis Diderot*, *The New York Review of Books*, March 4, 1993, p. 16.

Print culture is not merely a formalization of spoken culture; the two cultures, including their Truths, are different in a fundamental sense which only now, with the end of the dominance of the former, will begin to become clear. (I invite any still-skeptical readers to imagine Heidegger, that great admirer of the ancient Greeks, as a philosopher in ancient Athens. The imposing lecturer and revered author of some of the most obscure philosophical works of the twentieth century — this master of hiding behind the printed word, this master of print as art form, this master of *one-way communication* — would be fleeing to Germany in a matter of weeks — *days* — from the conversation-based philosophical environment of the ancient Greeks.)

"Karl Popper's intolerance of any criticism of his own views was a standing joke against his theory that inventing hypotheses and subjecting them to critical testing was the key to scientific progress....[His] temperamental irritability ... led students to joke that *The Open Society and Its Enemies* should have been called '*The Open Society* by one of its enemies.'" — Ryan, Alan, "Wise Man" (on Isaiah Berlin), *The New York Review of Books*, Dec. 17, 1998, p. 29.

Unfortunately, such a revision of procedure will never come about in the present university system, and, at present, even in centers of civilization like Berkeley, there seems not the slightest awareness, among intellectuals outside the university, of the inherent importance, value, depth, uniqueness of informal communication.

An Alternative for Authors of Literary Works

The first question an author must ask him or herself about any piece of fiction he or she plans to write or is already writing is: *what business am I in*? The answer may be one or more of the following (taking the most obvious first). The list is, of course, not exhaustive.

To make money;
To become famous;
To shock and antagonize;
To inspire others;
To make people laugh;
To propagandize for a cause (cf. Shaw, Brecht);
To set forth a way of experiencing the world (cf. Sartre);
To provide your intended audience with a mirror (flattering or otherwise) (cf. *New Yorker* stories);
To tell what you can't help feeling is "a good story";
To "practice the craft", i.e., merely exercise your skill at writing certain kinds of description;
To "order your life" (i.e., record some of the most important events of your life, possibly under a veneer of fiction, in order in this way to "contain" them and/or get on top of them and/or better understand them.)
To make your life, which is now worthless, acquire worth through the approval by prestigious people (e.g., publishers or posterity) of your presentation of it;
To make your life, which is now worthless, acquire worth through the recognition by presti-

gious people that you have proper literary manners;

To gain immortality (but see below);

To express overwhelming despair and hopelessness (cf. Kafka, Eliot);

To demonstrate the hopelessness and futility of your own life, and/or to convince others that life is worthless (cf. the typical diary or journal).

On The "Immortality" Supposedly Conferred by Print

Authors who believe that writing (print) is a means of gaining immortality should determine for themselves the answers the following questions.

(0) How many people have written books? (In 1996, the Library of Congress collection numbered more than *100 million items*; 357,437 books were added in 1995 alone! — Manguel, Alberto, *A History of Reading,* Viking, N.Y., 1996, jacket.)

(1) How many books are published each year in the world?, the answer to be broken down by country and type of book.

(2) How many publishers are there in the world?, the answer to be broken down by type of book, and number of books of each type published each year. (In the early '90's, there were over *20,000* publishers listed in *Books in Print* alone!)

(3) How many books are remaindered each year? (same breakdown).

(4) How many books, published since, say, 1800, have been permanently lost to posterity, either through lack of readers, or loss of printing plates and mss., or deterioration of the paper they were printed on, or other reasons?

(5) How many authors who, since, say, 1800, had at least one work published by a commercial publisher or by a magazine or academic journal, are now known, if at all, only by name because, e.g., all copies of their works have been lost for the reasons given in (4)?

On Being Published

The Russian *samizdat* tradition is a lesson for every aspiring U.S. writer. *No writer needs to be published in order to be read.* If he is unable to find a circle of compatible writers who are willing (eager!) to exchange and criticize each other's manuscripts, he can run an ad in a literary journal or paper like *The New York Review of Books*, giving a brief description of his book and offering to sell copies of the manuscript, or else giving a web site address where the book can be read free of charge. Of course, he should be prepared to confront deep-seated prejudices. One author was told by an academic, and, I think, truthfully, "People are suspicious of anyone selling his own intellectual wares. They want the validation provided by a middleman (publisher)." Well, "people" maybe...

It will be argued that the new ease of self-publishing made possible by the computer at the very least eliminates the need to obtain other people's approval in order to get something published. The problem, however, is not "publishing", but reaching those with an interest in our work — those who will criticize and discuss and argue about it with us, and for that, self-publishing is a waste of time. You don't need all those typefaces and all that fancy formatting: all you need is a manuscript and a visit to your local copy center, or else making your book available online!

I would rather have a readership of ten people I respected than a thousand I didn't. I consider the first order of business, beyond getting the words on paper, to be to find those ten people. Getting published is a distant third or fourth. *I'd rather be read than published*.

An Alternative for Artists

In the arts, I can do no better than cite the example of a painter I know who lives in the Oakland hills. He is, and always has been, a representationalist who, with exceptional craftsmanship, paints the traditional subjects — portraits, nudes, still lifes, landscapes. (In no way do I mean to suggest that the artistic school he belongs to has anything to do with his artistic morality). Now in his eighties, he is the informal center of a circle of various odd-ball intellectuals, art students, middle-aged hippies, relatives, and long-time neighbors. I don't know or care what posterity's judgement will be of him as a painter, but I do know that I have never heard the winner-loser, success-failure talk from him that obsesses so many artists and intellectuals these days. (Also, as far as I know, no one in his circle has the slightest interest in therapy.) Unlike, e.g., the typical artist living and working in the *being-seen* frenzy of the New York art world, he simply paints and, occasionally, with great reluctance, sells a painting to someone he believes will appreciate it, hang it on the wall of their home, and not view it primarily as an "investment".

The morality he lives can be succinctly expressed, and might well serve as a model for all intellectuals and artists who hate the present morality: the pursuit of one's highest aspirations in the company of loving friends.

Concluding Inspirational Postscript

"I think the thing that many of us are having hassles with is what Jason Miles, keyboardist and programmer extraordinnaire, calls 'getting over' — being heard, read, published, broadcast, admired. It's really a separate issue from conceiving and implementing, and a place where it's easy to get hung up. My cousin Cynthia is a beautiful writer, working on a novel and short stories about her childhood... She's read some of her stuff aloud at various gatherings I've been at, and it's clear and touching and very real. She says she's giving it a year, at the end of which time, if she's not published, she's going to commit suicide.

"I think that all of us really know, each in our own way, what we have to do to 'get over', and we each have to deal in our own way with *not* doing it. Why do we not want to be happy?" — (letter from a musician/composer friend)

Excerpt from my reply:

"You say that all of us really know what we have to do to 'get over'", and you're absolutely right. As you know, I post ads for my privately-printed books on the bulletin boards at some of the local universities. I have sold a number of copies this way. '...Delivery on campus. Examine before you buy. Money-back guarantee.' So far, I have had no requests for money back.)

"Now, you've got to understand: this is considered the very bottom of the bottom for any author, and yet for me it is always an exhilirating, proud experience. I like the *cleanness* of the whole thing: I have a book to sell; you can examine it before you buy it; if you buy it and decide it's not worth the price, I give you your money back. Furthermore I invite you to tell me where you think it's wrong. Clean, simple, honorable. I have been bowled over by how far it is from the indescribably humiliating ordeal of trying to find a publisher — the enormous and ever-increasing time and effort that must go into that process. *I'd rather be read than published* — please tell that to Cynthia, and tell her I'd be glad to talk to her about her current one-year pact with herself, *not* to discourage her, but just to tell her I hate to see someone give so much benefit of the doubt to people who are no doubt her inferiors, namely, the dim, nervous, uncreative, two-steps-behind

types who occupy publishers' offices, and the wimps who edit small magazines. Tell her that suicide may be perfectly acceptable if she is unable to reach anyone by any means, but that if she is moving people by reading her work aloud to them, as she no doubt is, that is *much more important* than getting published. Tell her it's a whole new ballgame, and that I'm proud as punch to be selling my books directly to my readers, via ads on university bulletin boards. Tell her I'd be glad to read some of her stuff, as long as she understands that I will give her the most honest, artist-to-artist criticism I can, and that I will not pull punches out of fear that saying what I think may cause her to kill herself. Tell her that one reason we artists and intellectuals are living in such hell is that we have become so grotesquely separated from our audiences. Fiction *began* with people telling stories to one another, not with authors fucking crawling on their hands and knees to publishers! Tell her that reading aloud to others can be for her what Moliere's twelve years of performing in the provinces with his troupe was for him, namely, where she can truly learn her trade. Tell her to fuck *The New Yorker*, fuck the little magazines, fuck the academics, fuck the publishers, but instead to reach out to real human beings who will listen to her and read her work and tell her what they think of it. Tell her."

Once we break out of the literary establishment's evil spell, namely, that not to be published means that your work (and you) are worthless, then we can for the first time think about what it means to have readers, what it means to *allow* someone to read our work. We should be as discriminating in our choice of readers as we are in our choice of writers. We should view with contempt the idea of handing our work over to the dim, uncomprehending minds that occupy publishers' offices, so that they can prepare it for a mob that wouldn't even *think* of reading anything that someone important hadn't told them to read.