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Author(s): ROBERT DARNTON

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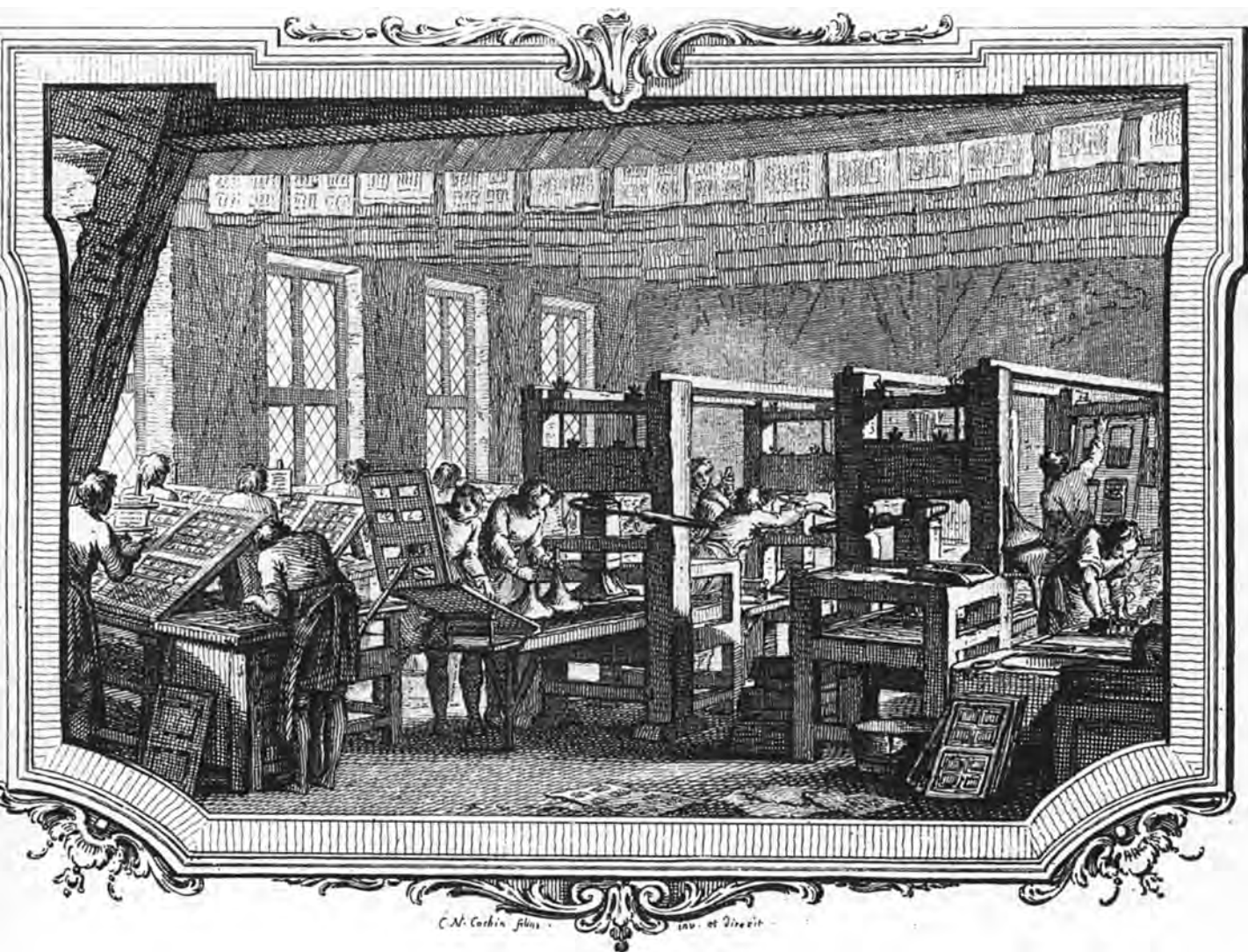


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Work and Culture in an Eighteenth-Century Printing Shop

BY ROBERT DARNTON



This article is an abridged version of an Engelhard Lecture on the Book presented by the author at the Library of Congress on March 25, 1981. Sponsored by the Center for the Book, the Engelhard lecture series was established by Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard in memory of her husband.

Old books tend to become antiques. Like china or Chippendale, they pass from auctions to collectors to treasure houses, and out of daily use. Of course the reader in search of an eighteenth-century volume can find one, but he usually has to venture into the strange world of rare book rooms. If he is a student in a university, he may be overcome with awe: here lies the inner sanctum of the campus, its ultimate repository of learning, its cultural core. If he is a researcher in a national library, he may be seized with fear and trembling. For here the book sits in state, surrounded by vaulted ceilings and paneled walls. To reach it, he must walk past guards, down halls, and into inner chambers, where he checks his briefcase, forswears ink, and lowers his voice until he is absorbed in the reverential silence that reigns over the room and at last The Book appears.

How different was the world in which that book came into being. Brawny, bawdy, rowdy, and crowded, it was the antithesis of today's rare book room. Benjamin Franklin stepped into that world two and a half centuries ago, when he entered Watt's printing house near

Lincoln's Inn Fields in London as a nineteen-year-old journeyman. He was immediately struck by the stench of beer:

"My companion at the press drank every day a pint before breakfast with his bread and cheese, a pint between breakfast and dinner, a pint at dinner, a pint in the afternoon about six o'clock, and another when he had done his day's work. I thought it a detestable custom." When Franklin switched from the press to the composing room, the compositors demanded the payment of the traditional five shillings of "bien venu" before admitting him. Ben had already paid this entrance fee to the pressmen, so he refused. He was then assaulted by practical jokes, having "little pieces of private malice" practiced on him, his sorts mixed, and his matter broken. Eventually he caved in and paid up to the chapel, and soon he was reforming its code of conduct, commending the nutritional virtues of porridge over beer for breakfast.¹

The early-modern printing shop was a world of its own, a world we have lost and cannot recapture simply by consulting the books that it produced. To get behind its books, we must go to the archives of printing houses, where we can observe the men at work and listen to the bosses talking about them.

The richest archives come from the Société typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), a Swiss firm that produced French books for readers everywhere in Europe during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. As the STN drew labor from printing centers in France, Switzerland, and the Rhineland, its directors developed a network of recruiting agents, who dispatched journeymen and discussed the labor

An eighteenth-century depiction of a printing shop. Compositors are setting type at left, in the most well-lit parts of the room nearest the windows. Workers are inking the type in the form on the press at center and to the right men work the presses and pull printed sheets.

Engraving by C. N. Cochin from C. Henault, *Nouvel Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France*, 3d ed. (Paris: Prault pere, Prault fils, Desaint & Saillant, 1749), p. 268.

market in a stream of letters, which reveal some basic assumptions about work and workers under the Old Regime.

The most revealing exchange of letters occurred in 1777, when the STN doubled the size of its shop in order to print the quarto edition of the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert and when the boom in printing encyclopedias had strained resources throughout the industry. The workers took advantage of this temporary labor shortage by moving from job to job, whenever they could find better pay or working conditions: hence the theme of journeying, which recurs throughout the letters. The STN's greatest inducement in hiring workers was probably "le voyage," a sum of money which corresponded roughly to the amount a man would have made during the time it took him to walk to his new job. Workers preferred to spend ten or twelve hours on the road, with stops at country inns, to heaving at the bar of a press or bending over type cases for an equal amount of time. Their journeys became a kind of paid vacation and journeying a way of life, at least during the journeyman's early years.

Sometimes one can follow the men by the dates on letters. For example, on June 16, 1777, at the height of the *Encyclopédie* boom, a Parisian recruiter sent off six workers to Neuchâtel, promising that they would receive twenty-four livres in voyage upon their arrival. They reported to the STN exactly two weeks later, having averaged thirty-six kilometers a day. As they made about ten to fifteen livres a week, their travel money covered two weeks' wages—good compensation for a cross-country hike in the early summer.

But the STN refused to pay the voyage until the men had worked for at least one month. The recruiter had neglected to inform them of this proviso; and in case they refused to accept it he had kept their belongings ("hardes") as a kind of security deposit, which he later shipped to the STN. The men then had no choice but to set to work, composing and printing the *Encyclopédie*. Their names appeared regularly in the foreman's wage book for eight weeks, long enough for them to collect their voyage and their hardes—and then they disappeared.

Some of them turned up a few weeks later

in Genevan shops, which were also printing the *Encyclopédie*. At least one went to the shop of Barthélemy de Félice, who was producing a rival, "Protestant" version of the *Encyclopédie* in Yverdon. One pressman, Gaillard, surfaced in Paris a year later, asking to be rehired by the STN. He repented for "all the faults he committed," according to a letter written for him by a Parisian leather merchant, and he was ready to set out for Switzerland once more—for the third time.²

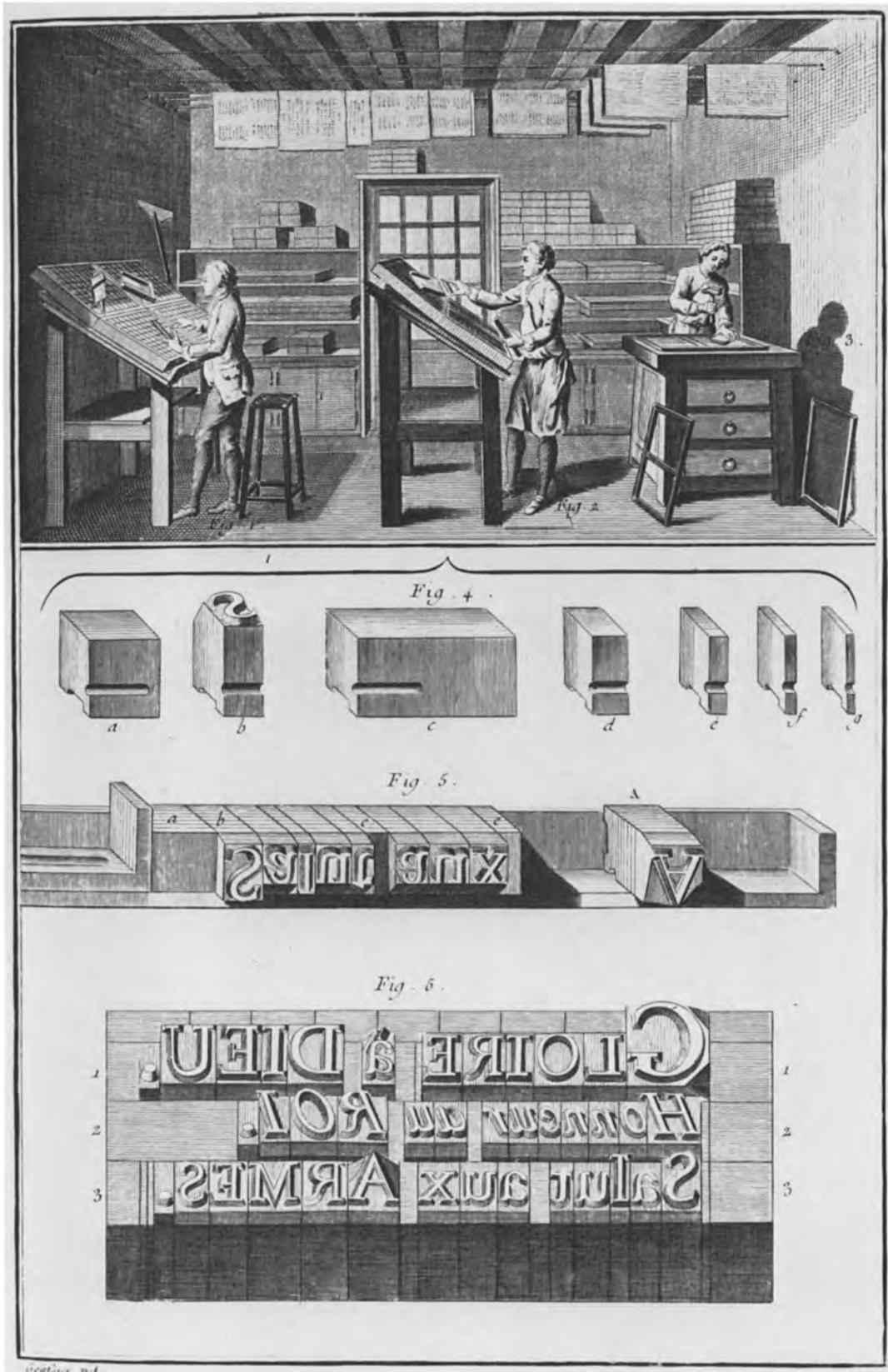
What were Gaillard's "faults"? His letter does not say, but the STN's correspondence shows that men often "deserted" after getting in trouble. Sometimes they ran off after piling up debts or collecting "salé," a small advance on the next week's wages. They rarely accumulated capital and were often tempted to leave one town in order to escape debts and to collect some voyage in another. As a result of these incidents, the employers' letters struck a note of basic mistrust whenever they referred to workers. Workers were unreliable. If they did not make off with their voyage or their salé, they would fail to show up because they were drunk. At worst they would act as spies, either for the French police or for rival publishers.³

Comments made by employers also suggest some unspoken premises about what moved workers. For example, the STN instructed an agent who was dispatching some workers from Lyons: "We promise to pay them, after arrival, twelve livres for their voyage, provided they

In the composing room, a compositor chooses type from the case for the composing stick in his left hand, his eye on the manuscript copy. A second compositor moves a justified line of type from the composing stick to the galley. At right a worker planes the type in an iron chase, tapping the letters with a mallet to guarantee an even surface for printing.

Various pieces of loose type include a letter S and six different size spaces. A composing stick has letters inserted in it and three justified lines of type include both roman and italic letters.

*"Imprimerie en lettres, l'opération de la casse." Engraving from the *Encyclopédie* plate volumes, *Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques, avec leur explication*, vol. 7 (Paris: Chez Briasson, Le Breton, 1769), "Imprimerie en caractères," plate 1.*



remain with us at least three months . . . and you may assure them that they will be satisfied with us and with this country, where good wine grows." ⁴ The assumption was that work was mixed up with wine—and that employment would be short.

In the course of the hiring and firing, the employers seemed to treat workers as things, They ordered them in batches, like paper and ink. As the STN explained to an agent in Lyons,

In the course of the hiring and firing, the employers seemed to treat workers as things. They ordered them in batches, like paper and ink. As the STN explained to an agent in Lyons, "They should come assorted, that is, so many compositors, so many pressmen." ⁵ It sometimes rejected these "assortments," if the goods were shoddy, precisely as it did in its purchases of paper. Thus it reprimanded a recruiter in Lyons: "Two of those whom you have sent to us have arrived all right, but so sick that they could infect all the rest; so we haven't been able to hire them. No one in town wanted to give them lodging. They have therefore left again and took the route for Besançon, in order to turn themselves in at the "hôpital." ⁶ As the hôpital usually meant death for the disease-ridden poor, the STN must have known that it was probably sending those men on the last leg of their last tour de France—and it was no easy road across the Jura Mountains from Neuchâtel to Besançon.

Occasionally the incoming letters showed some sympathy for the men. For example, a master printer in Bern recommended an old compositor as follows: "He is a good worker, who worked quite a while in Neuchâtel some time ago, but I must tell you that his sight and his hearing are beginning to go and that his old age means that he no longer has the speed in composing of a robust young man. Still, as you will only be paying him piece rates, I beg you to keep him as long as you can; for he is reduced by his indigence to a pitiful state." ⁷

The fact remains that the Bernois had fired him and that the Neuchâtelois refused to hire him. Indeed, the STN fired two-thirds of its workers as soon as it completed the *Encyclopédie*, despite the protests of one of the director's daughters, who wrote to him while he was on a business trip and she was tending the

shop, "One can hardly turn out on the street, from one day to the next, people who have wives and children." ⁸ That objection had not occurred to the director, who brushed it off with a lecture about profitability.

But how did the workers themselves represent their condition? Despite the research of specialists like E. P. Thompson, Maurice Garden, and Rudolf Braun, historians have failed to make direct contact with eighteenth-century artisans. But printers were an unusually literate group. Some of them exchanged letters, some of which were intercepted by the masters and have survived in the papers of the STN.

One of those precious specimens of worker-to-worker communication is a note by an Avignonese compositor called Offray to a Savoyard called Ducret, who was on the composing crew of the STN. Offray had recently quit the STN in order to join the shop of Bathélemy de Félice at Yverdon, where, he assured Ducret, conditions were much better. To be sure, employment with Félice had its disadvantages: the "professor," as the men called him, never lent his employees a penny, and the German workers did not get on well with the French. But life was cheaper and the shop better run than in Neuchâtel. And above all, there was plenty of work: "Work here is sufficient. . . . You will not need to worry about work." ⁹ The availability of work could be a source of worry, because the masters hired by the job. When they finished printing one book, they often fired the hands who had worked on it and then hired new ones when they were ready to begin another.

Thus Offray passed on reports about the availability of jobs in other shops in the area. Heubach of Lausanne needed a compositor and maybe even a foreman. There was room for at least two pressmen in Yverdon and also for three compositors, because three of Offray's

A case of roman letters arranged as they commonly were in Paris in the eighteenth century. Capitals and small capitals are at the top with unusual characters used least frequently. Lowercase roman and italic type is at the bottom of the case.

"Imprimerie, casse." Engraving from the *Encyclopédie* plate volumes, *Recueil de planches*, vol. 7, "Imprimerie en caractères," plate 3.

Fig. 1^e

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
H	I	K	L	M	N	O	H	I	K	L	M	N	O
P	Q	R	S	T	V	X	P	Q	R	S	T	V	X
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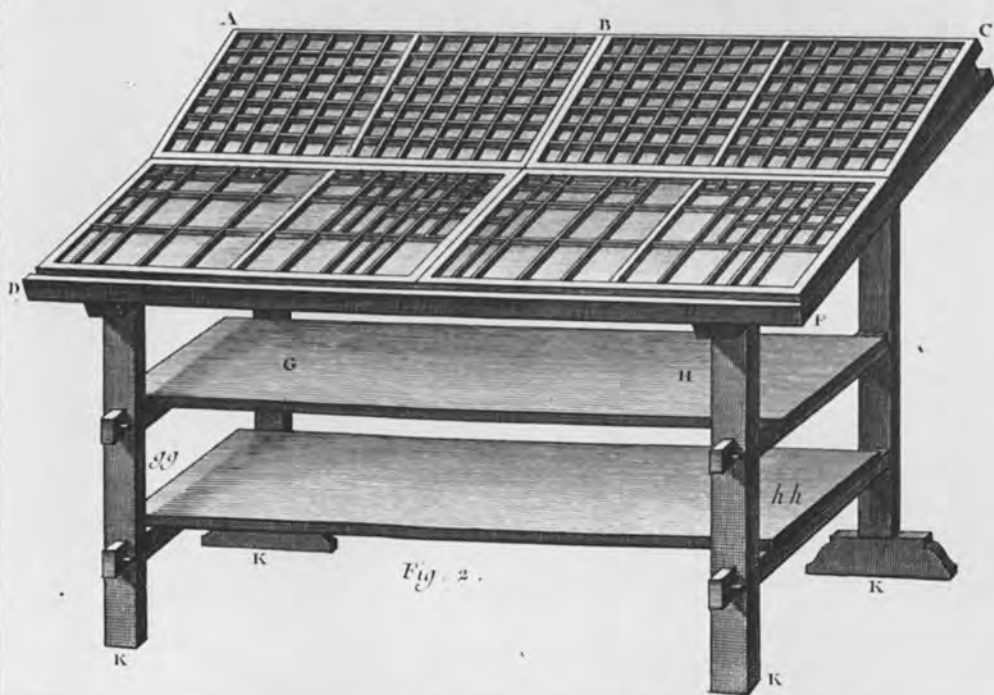


Fig. 2.

Double 161

comrades were secretly planning to walk out on Felice the next Sunday. "It's not that there is any lack of work, but only because of the caprice of the workers—and me first of all—to change jobs all the time."

Finally, Offray sent news about mutual friends in other shops and sent his regards to his former mates in Neuchâtel: "I wrote to M. Gorin, and when I hear from him, as I hope I will, I'll let you know. Please say hello to M. Cloches, M. Borrel, M. Poncillon, M. Patin, M. Ango; and don't forget by old mate Gaillé. . . . My wife also sends her greeting to all these Messieurs. I had forgotten M. Lancy, whom I greet also, as well as Madame pot-au-lait."¹⁰ The nicknames, the allusion to other exchanges of letters, and the sense of a shared network of friends all suggest that the workers had developed their own information system and exchanged letters of recommendation about their bosses—or "bourgeois" as they called them—just as the masters and recruiting agents exchanged letters about the workers.¹¹

Workers and bourgeois did not live together in the familial coziness imagined by some historians of preindustrial Europe. They probably hated each other as much as they did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But they shared common assumptions about the relationships between them—that is, about the fundamental character of employment. They expected it to be erratic and irregular, possibly stormy and probably short, but nothing that would remotely resemble such modern phenomena as the forty-hour, nine-to-five work week, with time-and-a-half for overtime.

Such were the attitudes toward work among eighteenth-century printers and their masters, but what was work in and of itself? Its subjective reality may always elude historians, but it is possible to measure its productivity by analyzing the wage book kept by Barthélemy Spineux, the STN's shop foreman. Every Saturday evening, Spineux noted how much work each man had done during the preceding week and how much pay he had received for it. Spineux tallied the compositors' output according to the signatures on the bottom of the sheets they had composed and reckoned the output of pressmen by thousands of impressions. By

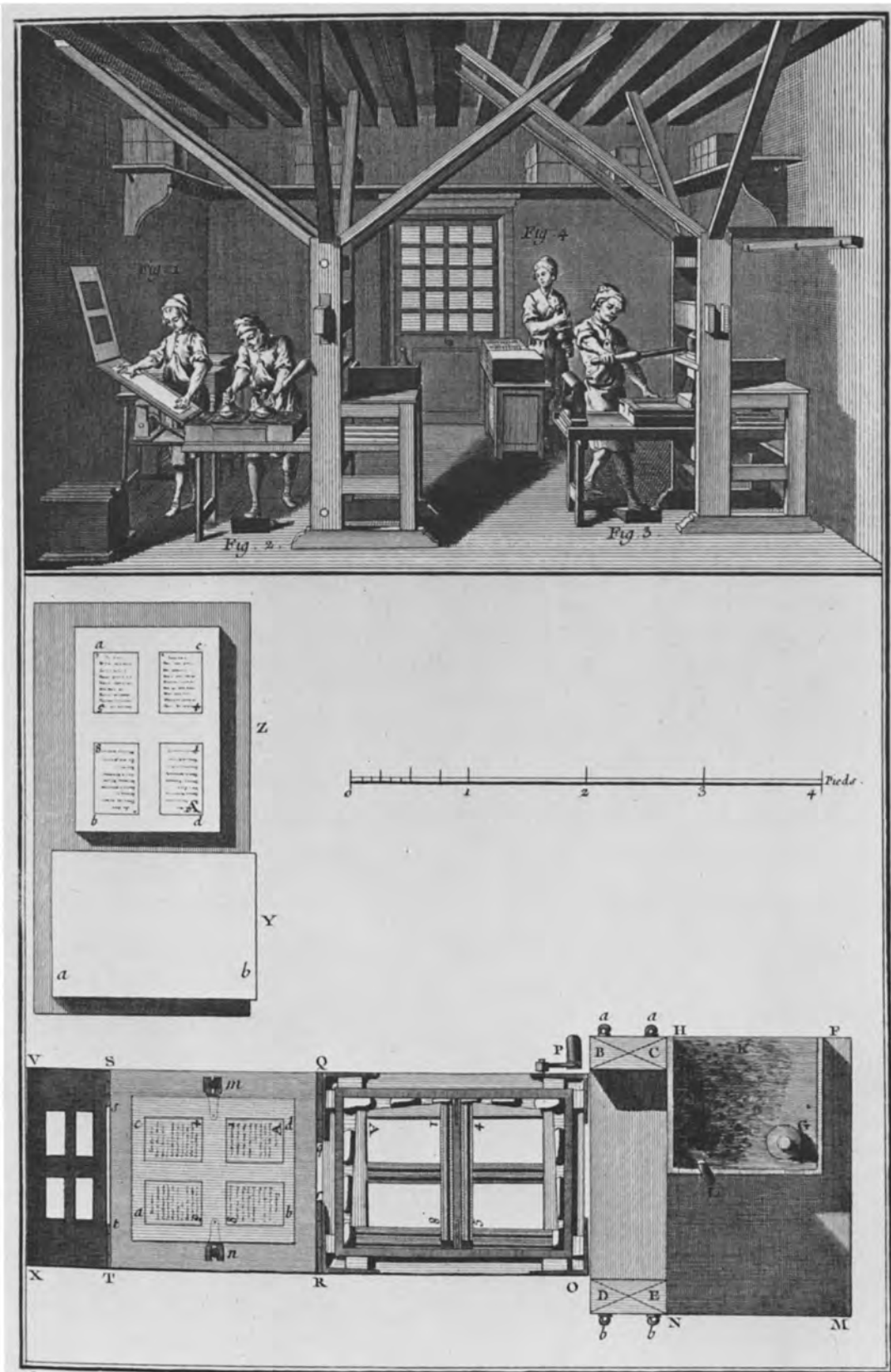
counting the ens in the actual texts, one can use Spineux's record to calculate the number of motions made by each compositor each week as he transferred type from the case to the composing stick. One can also calculate the number of times each pressman pulled on the bar of his press. Unfortunately, these calculations involve some strenuous exercises in "analytic bibliography," but a bibliographical analysis of Spineux's wage book provides the first precise record of output and income among preindustrial workers.

Without wandering into complexities and presenting charts and graphs, I would like to go directly to the main conclusions that I have drawn from my statistics.¹² First, it is clear that the personnel changed at a tremendous pace. Almost half the work force was new every six months, and the shop as a whole was rarely the same from one week to the next, because the men came and went *pêle-mêle*, according to the irregular availability of jobs and their own "caprice," as Offray put it. It would be misleading to extract averages from such an erratic pattern, but it seems that the men fell into two main groups: transients, who usually stayed with the STN for less than six months, and regulars, who remained for a year or more. The regulars tended to be older, married men, although they included some youths. And in the case of compositors, they were identified with particular jobs. For example, one veteran, Bertho, handled most of the typesetting on the *Encyclopédie* for eighty-eight weeks and left the STN as soon as it had printed its last volume. Thus

The composing room communicates with the press room, shown above on the opposite page, through the door in the center of the rear wall. At left a worker lays a sheet of paper, from the reams stored on the high shelves around the walls, on the press. Next, the type is inked, and to the right a man operates the press, while another checks the inking of the sheets pulled and applies ink to the surfaces of two ink balls.

A bird's-eye view of the press shows the chase where the forms containing the type are secured for printing.

"Imprimerie, l'opération d'imprimer et plan de la presse." Engraving from the *Encyclopédie* plate volumes, *Recueil de planches*, vol. 7, "Imprimerie en caractères," plate 14.



the statistics bear out the emphasis on jobs—“ouvrage” or “labour” in the printer’s jargon—which shows up so strongly in the letters of the workers.

Secondly, by tracing the composition and presswork done by every man on every sheet for a period of five months in 1778, it is possible to see how the foreman coped with the irregular supply of labor. Pressmen worked downstream of compositors in the flow of work. So if several compositors quit the STN, a proportionate number of pressmen had to be fired. Thus in the week of October 10, three compositors left the STN, reducing the size of the composing crew, or “casse,” from thirteen to ten workers, and the foreman cut the press crew, the work force at the “presse,” from twenty to twelve while total output declined by half. A new job and a fresh infusion of compositors would reverse the process, as in the period from September 5 to 19, when the casse grew from nine to twelve workers and the presse from thirteen to eighteen while output doubled. The graph of manpower and productivity is extraordinarily jagged. It soars and plunges dramatically from week to week, suggesting that labor management was a balancing act, performed at a heavy cost, both economic and human.

Thirdly, it is possible to trace the output and income of individual workers, and here, too, the pattern shows enormous variety, both from worker to worker and in the behavior of the same worker from week to week. Typographers belonged to what is often called, rather misleadingly, the “labor aristocracy”—that is, they were skilled craftsmen who made twice as much money as common laborers. As long as their work held out, they could bring home about 100 Neuchâtel batz or 15 livres tournois a week—enough to support a family and a good deal more than the earnings of textile workers, masons, and carpenters in France. But they frequently earned far less than they were capable of earning not because the work gave out but because they chose to do less of it.

In the week of October 3, for example, the output of one compositor, Tef, dropped by half (from 92 to 46 batz), while that of another, Maley, increased by a third (from 70 to 105 batz). Each man had plenty of copy to set but preferred to work at his own pace, in erratic

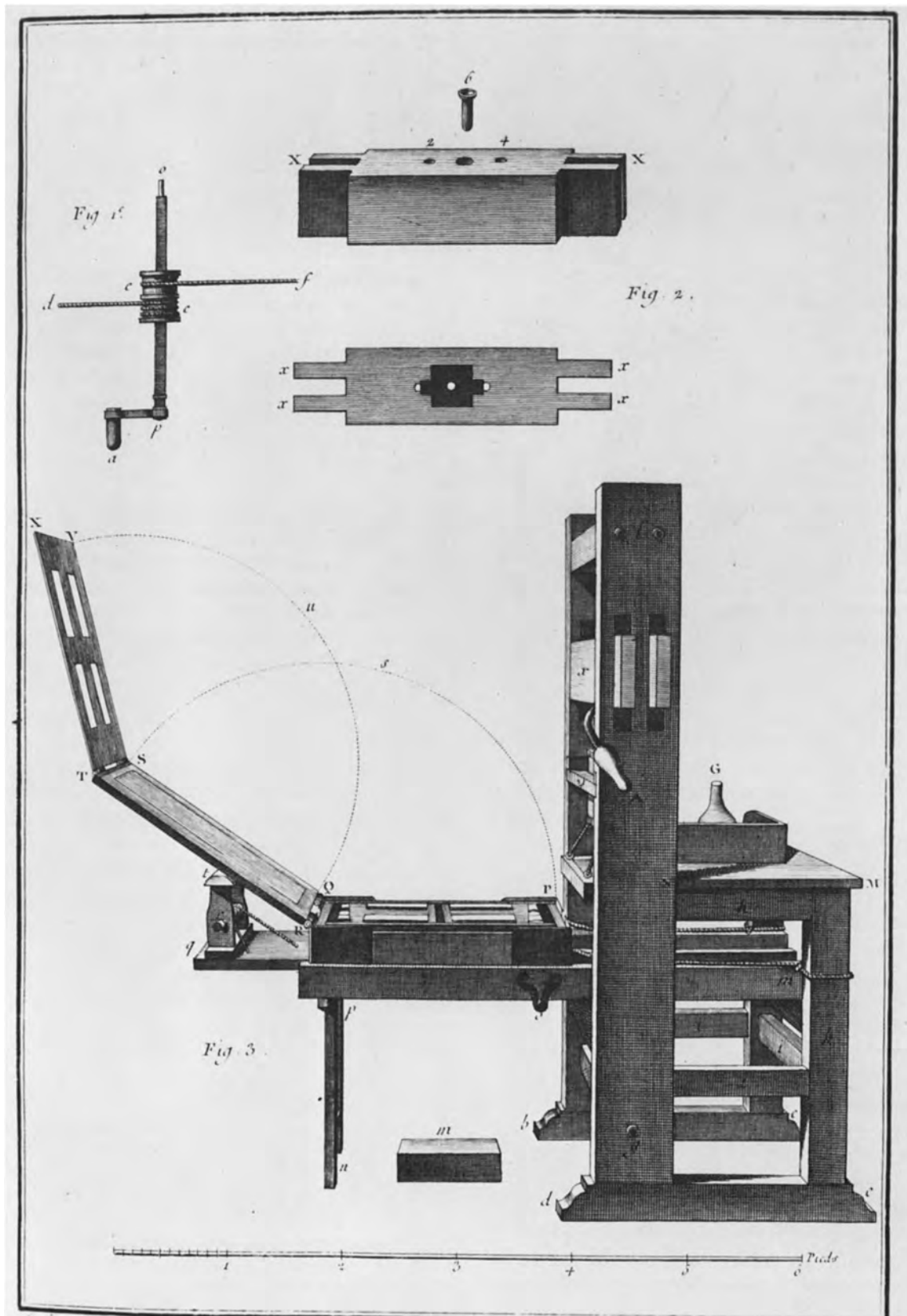
s spurts. The irregularities were even more pronounced among the press crews. Chambrault and his companion earned 258 batz and ran off 18,000 impressions in the week of June 13; and in the next two weeks their output plummeted to 12,000 and then 7,000 impressions, while their combined income dropped to 172 and 101 batz.

Most crews worked well below their full capacity most of the time. Only rarely can the drops in their productivity be attributed to holidays or a decline in the supply of work. The men slowed down or stopped completely in order to enjoy “débâche,” an old tradition in the printing trade, as is suggested by the following entry in the records of the Plantinian Press of Antwerp, dated June 11, 1564: “The said Michel went to the brothel and remained there Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday; then on Thursday morning came back to sleep on a trunk in the room where he normally abode.”¹³ Although the papers of the STN do not provide such generous details about how the men spent their free time, they show that there was time and money to be spent. No matter how one works up the data in the wage book, one finds erratic patterns of labor—in its duration, rhythm, organization, productivity, and remuneration.

If one compares the statistical data with the attitudes expressed in the letters, the pattern begins to look significant. The two types of evidence complement one another, suggesting the basic character of work as it was experienced and understood by the workers themselves. But before jumping to conclusions, I would like to take account of a third variety of evidence, one which can be called “cultural” in the anthropological sense of the term. I mean information about the traditions, folkways, and lore of the printing craft. There is a great deal of it, scattered through sources like printers’ manuals and memoirs, notably those of Franklin and

An upright screw hand press.

“Imprimerie; Presse vue par le côté du dehors.”
Engraving from the *Encyclopédie* plate volumes,
Recueil de planches, vol. 7, “Imprimerie en caractères,” plate 14.



Restif de la Bretonne. The richest source of all, however, is the *Anecdotes typographiques* of Nicolas Contat, a Parisian compositor who described his rise from apprentice to foreman in a shop of the rue Saint-Séverin in the 1730s and 1740s. Contat's account of how workers were hired, managed, and paid conforms in dozens of details to the picture that emerges from the papers of the STN. But it also adds a new dimension to that picture, because it is full of information about the culture of the printing shop, especially about rituals, slang, and jokes.

Attributing his experience to a fictional lad named Jerome, Contat describes a great many ceremonies, mainly feast days like those of St. Martin and St. John the Evangelist. But he puts special emphasis on the rituals that marked an apprentice's progress through the shop. For example, when Jerome joined the work force, he underwent a rite called "la prise de tablier" or taking of the apron. He had to pay six livres (about three days' wages for a good journeyman) to the "chapelle" or shop organization; the journeymen also taxed themselves slightly ("la reconnaissance," their payments were called). The whole work force repaired to Le Panier Fleury, one of the bistros patronized by printers in the rue de la Huchette, where the journeymen, with glasses filled, gathered around Jerome and the foreman. The subforeman approached carrying the printer's apron, followed by two "ancients," one from each of the two "estates" of the shop—the casse and the presse. The foreman made a short speech and placed the apron over the boy, trying the strings behind him. Then the journeymen applauded, drank to his health, and he, too, received a glass and joined in the drinking. Everyone retired to a table, where a gargantuan feast was waiting for them. While cramming meat and bread into their mouths they talked, not "about theology or philosophy and still less of politics. Each one speaks of his job: one will talk to you about the casse, another the presse, this one of the tympan, another of the inkball leathers. They all speak at the same time, whether they can be heard or not." At last, early in the morning, they separate—sotted but ceremonial to the end: "Bonsoir, M. notre prote; bonsoir Messieurs les compositeurs; bonsoir Messieurs les imprimeurs; bonsoir Jérôme." The text then ex-

plains that Jerome will be called by his first name until his is received as a journeyman.¹⁴

That moment comes four years later, after a good deal of hazing and two intermediary ceremonies called "Admission à l'ouvrage" and "Admission à la Banque." The form is the same—a celebration over food and drink after taxing the initiate—but this time the manuscript gives us a précis of the speech directed at Jerome.

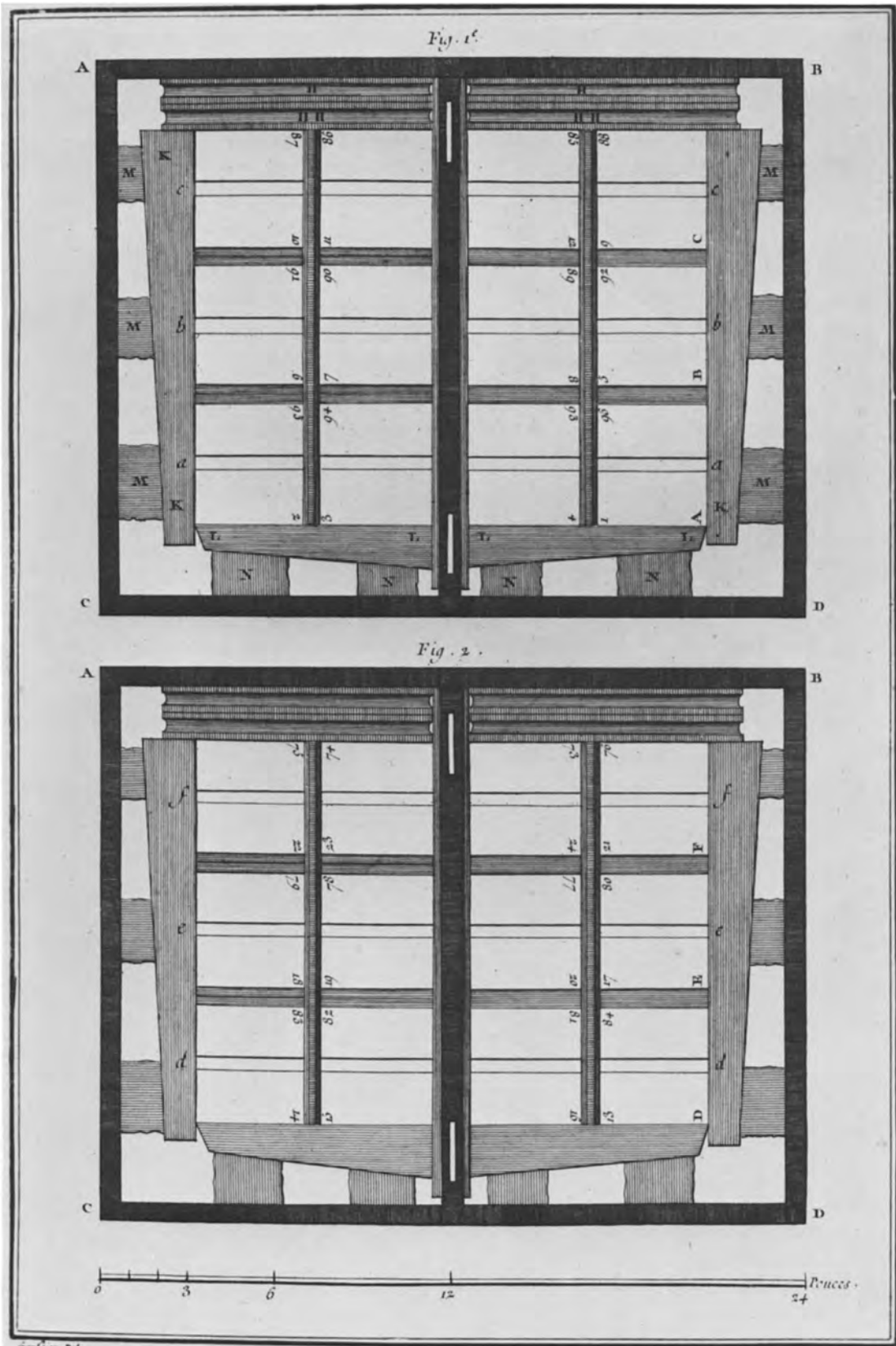
The newcomer is indoctrinated. He is told never to betray his colleagues and to maintain the wage rate. If a worker doesn't accept a price [for a job] and leaves the shop, no one in the house should do the job for a smaller price. Those are the laws among the workers. Faithfulness and probity are recommended to him. Any worker who betrays the others, when something forbidden, called "marron" [chestnut] is being printed, must be expelled ignominiously from the shop. The workers [blacklist] him by circular letters sent around all the shops of Paris and the provinces. . . . Aside from that, anything is permitted: excessive drinking is considered a good quality, gallantry and debauchery as folies of youth, indebtedness as a sign of wit, irreligion as sincerity; it's a free and republican territory in which everything is permitted; live as you like but be an honnête homme, no hypocrisy.

In short, Jerome assimilates a clearly articulated ethos, which seems several light years away from the worldly asceticism of Max Weber and the work discipline of the modern factory. And at this point he receives a new name: he drops Jerome and becomes a "Monsieur"—that is he occupies a new "état" or social estate. He has gone through a rite of passage in the strict, anthropological sense of the term.¹⁵

Meanwhile, of course, he has learned a trade. Much of the narrative concerns the way an apprentice picks up the skills of setting type and imposing forms. It even contains a glossary

A chase packed with furniture—pieces of wood or metal that hold the type in place—shows the imposition of pages for the signatures A, B, and C at the top. Another shows imposition for signatures D, E, and F, below.

"Imprimerie, imposition de l'in-vingt-quatre 1e. et 2e. forme." Engraving from the *Encyclopédie* plate volumes, *Recueil de planches*, vol. 7, "Imprimerie en caractères," plate 11.



to help the reader through the technicalities. The glossary gives an idea of the slang that constituted the language of the craft and suggests the atmosphere in which the work was done.

The workers also developed a special repertory of gestures and jokes. At their most elaborate, the jokes took the form of "copies," or burlesque skits designed to bring the house down in gales of laughter and rough music. The supreme copie during Jerome's years in the shop was staged by his fellow apprentice Léveillé, who had an unusual talent for mimicry. Forced to get up early and work late before retiring to a miserable room in the attic, the boys thought they were being treated like animals—worse, in fact, than the favorite animal of the household, a pet cat called "la grise," who ate choice morsels from the master's wife's plate. Early one morning, Léveillé decided he had had enough of this injustice. He crawled out on the roof near the master's bedroom window and began to howl and meow so loudly that he woke up the bourgeois and the bourgeoisie. After a week of this treatment, the master commissioned the boys to get rid of the cats, and they gladly complied.

Gleefully the two apprentices organized a cat massacre. Armed with tools from the shop, they clubbed every cat they could find, beginning with la grise. They staged a mock execution, stationing guards, naming a confessor, and pronouncing the sentence. Then they stood back and roared with laughter as a burlesque hangman dispatched the cats on an improvised gallows. The master's wife arrived in the midst of the fun and thinking she had seen la grise dangling from the noose, let out a scream. There was little the master could do, aside from scolding the men for slacking off work, because he had provided the occasion for the slaughter in the first place. The scene ended with the bourgeois retreating before a fresh chorus of laughter, and then it passed into the lore of the shop. For months afterward, Léveillé reenacted the entire episode in a kind of vaudeville routine, a copie of a copie, which provided the shop with comic relief whenever work began to drag. After he finished his number, the workers would express their delight by running composing

sticks over the type cases, banging hammers against chases, and bleating like goats. They had got the master's goat, had made him "prendre le chèvre."¹⁶

Of course jokes are not innocent, and this seems to be a case of especially meaningful joking. Léveillé's copie shows how intensely the workers hated the bourgeois and their alien way of life—a matter not just of wealth and power but of incompatible sensitivities. Pleasure in the coddling of pets was as foreign to the artisans as delight in cruelty to animals was to the masters. The ritual element in the cruelty warrants attention, because rituals abounded in the popular culture of the Old Regime, especially during periods of festivity like Mardi Gras, when the lower classes turned the world upside down in ceremonies that often ended with burlesque public executions. By condemning the cats, the journeymen printers symbolically put their masters on trial and vented their grievances in a mixture of street theater, carnival, and riotous witch-hunting.

The conclusions to be drawn from this material tend to be impressionistic, but I sense, first, a great emphasis on the specific and the concrete—the implements of work, conversation about the job at hand, a general concern with the here and now and the everyday world of familiar objects and immediate relations. The workers decked this world out with ceremonies and enlivened it with jokes, so work itself involved collective rituals, rites of passage and fun. There was no clear dividing line between work and play, or labor and what now passes for "leisure," a phenomenon that did not exist in the eighteenth century, when men mixed work and play indiscriminately throughout a twelve-, fourteen-, or sixteen-hour day.

At the same time, the jokes and slang emphasized the instability and irregularity of this kind of work—the violence, drunkenness, impoverishment, walking off and being laid off. Work was job-oriented and occurred by fits and starts rather than by regular employment in a single firm. The craft lore confirms the pattern of rapid turnover that one can see in the wage books and the emphasis on voyages that emerges from the masters' correspondence. As the men tramped from job to job, they identified

not with a class or a community or a firm but with the craft itself. They thought of themselves as journeymen printers, not simply as workers. They spoke their own language, revered their own saint (at least in Catholic countries), patronized their own bistros, and followed their own tour de France. Fellow-traveling even extended to Sunday outings, when they would wander about country taverns together, sometimes divided according to "estate," the *casse* in one group and the *presse* in another, and brawling with rival groups of cobblers or masons. The printers defined themselves against other crafts—and also against their masters. If the highly developed lore and ethos of their craft prevented them from feeling solidarity with workers in general, it expressed a strong hostility to the bourgeois. The printing shop did not function as some kind of warm and happy extended family. It was an intense and explosive little world.

In order to reconstruct that world, I have attempted to measure work statistically, to uncover the attitudes toward it among the workers and their bosses, and to see how it became embodied in a craft culture. Those three elements fit together to reveal the meaning of work for the journeymen printers of eighteenth-century France and Switzerland. Other men in other crafts, and the great mass of unskilled laborers,

probably understood their work differently, for the experience of working must have varied enormously. But if I could hazard one generalization from this very specific material, I would say that preindustrial work tended to be irregular and unstable, craft-specific and task-oriented, collective in its organization and individual in its pace—and that all these characteristics set it apart, as a general phenomenon, from work in the industrial era.

Thus in attempting to see behind the book, one can catch a glimpse of changes in a basic element of the human condition, work itself. The early modern book does not cease to seem precious when viewed in this light, but it looks different—less like an antique and more like a shard found on an ancient burial ground. By digging beneath it, one can explore an archaeological element in cultural history and an artisanal element in the history of communication through print.

ROBERT DARNTON is the author of *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the "Encyclopédie," 1775-1800* (1979) and *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (1968). Professor of history at Princeton University and a member of the Institute for Advanced Study there, he is also on the national advisory board for the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress.

NOTES

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1. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1916), chap. 3.

2. Thomas to Société typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), July 19, 1778, papers of the STN, Bibliothèque de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Unless indicated otherwise, all references come from these archives, and the name of the correspondent of the STN corresponds to a dossier in the STN papers. On this episode in the recruiting campaign, see Pyre to STN, June 16, 1777, and STN to Pyre, July 1, 1777.

3. The ideal compositor, "assiduous" and "not at all dissolute," is described in Christ to STN, January 8, 1773.

4. STN to Vernange, May 24, 1777.

5. STN to Claudet, May 8, 1777.

6. STN to Vernange, June 26, 1777.

7. Pfaehler to STN, March 3, 1772.

8. Mme. Bertrand to Ostervald of the STN, February 12, 1780.

9. Offray to Ducret of the STN, December 1770, cited in Jacques Rychner, "A l'ombre des Lumières: coup

d'oeil sur la main-d'oeuvre de quelques imprimeries du XVIIIème siècle," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 155 (1976): 1948-49. When Jacques Rychner completes his dissertation on the STN, it will be possible to follow the peregrinations of the journeyman printers in splendid detail.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Workers wanted to know where the pay was good, the work plentiful, the companions sympathetic, the wine cheap, and the foreman a soft touch. See, for example, Nicolas Contat dit Le Brun, *Anecdotes typographiques où l'on voit la description des coutumes, moeurs et usages singuliers des compagnons imprimeurs*, ed. Giles Barber (Oxford, 1980), part 2, chap. 2.

12. Some of these data appear in chapter 5 of my book *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the "Encyclopédie," 1775-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), but most of them remain unpublished.

13. Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Gendt, 1972), 2: 351.

14. Contat, *Anecdotes typographiques*, part 1, chap. 3.

15. *Ibid.*, part 2, chap. 1.

16. *Ibid.*, part 1, chap. 6.