Transmission of Ideas?
Encyclopédie (1751-1772)*

71,818 articles; 2,855 plates (pages of illustrations)
28 volumes in-folio (approx. 19” x 12” x 2.5”)
   17 volumes of text (1751-1765); 11 of images (1762-1772)
subscriber’s cost for the first edition, 980 livres **

other folio editions: Geneva reprint of original; contraband versions published in Italian peninsula (Lucca, Leghorn)

quarto editions (approx. 12” x 9.5”)
published in Geneva, Neufchatel, 1777-79;
36 volumes of text and 3 of images
(print run: approx. 8400)

ocatavo editions (approx. 9” x 6”)
published in Lausanne, Bern, 1778-1782;

TOTAL: approx 23,500

** when skilled workers earned 2-5 livres/day and approx. ten pounds of bread could be bought for one livre

“Pin Making (iii)” from the Encyclopédie
1745—publishers acquire the “privilege” (i.e., are licensed) to produce a multi-volume encyclopedia to be edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert

1751—first volume, “A-Azymites” published

1756—volume 7 (“Foang-Gythium”) published

1758—Helvétius publishes *De l’esprit*

1759—Encyclopédie banned by Paris Parlement (highest judicial body in France); added to the Index of books that Catholics were forbidden to read;

1765—volume 8 (“H-Itzehoa”) published

“Ut Primum”—papal encyclical banning the Encyclopédie (September 1759)

Illustration from the “Dressmaker” plates in the Encyclopédie
Encyclopedism and authorship

at least 140 contributors

no known author: 40%

de Jaucourt: wrote close to 25%

Diderot, abbé Mallet, Boucher d’Argis—another 20-25%

one-third of identified authors wrote only one article

His grey tuft of hair and his affectedness give him the air of an old coquette who still tries to please, while his pose makes him look more like a bureaucrat than a philosophe…. If it had not been for the mad Madame van Loo, who came and chattered with him while he was being painted, he would not have this air.

Denis Diderot, Salon de 1767 (cited in Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality), commenting on this painting.
“The "author-function" is not universal or constant in all discourse. Even within our civilization, the same types of texts have not always required authors; there was a time when those texts which we now call "literary" (stories, folk tales, epics and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any questions about the identity of their author. …their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity. Texts, however, that we now call "scientific" …were only considered truthful during the Middle Ages if the name of the author was indicated. Statements on the order of "Hippocrates said..." or "Pliny tells us..." were not merely formulas for an argument based on authority; they marked a proven discourse. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a totally new conception was developed when scientific texts were accepted on their own merits and positioned within an anonymous and coherent conceptual system of established truths and methods of verification. Authentication no longer required reference to the individual who had produced them; the role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness.”

Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” (1970)