The Culture of Diagram

John Bender, Michael Marrinan

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The Culture of Diagram is about visual thinking. Exploring a terrain where words meet pictures and formulas meet figures, the book foregrounds diagrams as tools for blurring those boundaries to focus on the production of knowledge as process. It outlines a history of convergence among diverse streams of data in real-time: from eighteenth-century print media and the diagrammatic procedures in the pages of Diderot's *Encyclopedia* to the paintings of Jacques-Louis David and mathematical devices that reveal the unseen worlds of quantum physics. Central to the story is the process of correlation, which invites observers to participate by eliciting leaps of imagination to fill gaps in data, equations, or sensations. This book traces practices that ran against the grain of both Locke's clear and distinct ideas and Newton's causality—practices greatly expanded by the calculus, probabilities, and protocols of data sampling.

Today's digital technologies are rooted in the ability of high-speed computers to correct errors when returning binary data to the human sensorium. High-tech diagrams echo the visual structures of the *Encyclopedia*, arraying packets of dissimilar data across digital spaces instead of white paper. The culture of diagram broke with the certainties of eighteenth-century science to expand the range of human experience. Speaking across disciplines and discourses, Bender and Marrinan situate our modernity in a new and revealing light.

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