

GEOMETRIC DATA ANALYSIS in a SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROGRAM: the case of Bourdieu's sociology

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Abstract:

There is an essential aspect of Bourdieu's work that has been somewhat neglected by those who have written about Bourdieu's theory, that is his constant concern for quantifying his data material and for putting his thinking in mathematical terms.

The first purpose of this communication is to provide landmarks for this aspect, and to outline the solution that was retained by Bourdieu, at least from La distinction onward: namely the Geometric Modelling of Data, based on Geometric Data Analysis. As Bourdieu firmly expresses:

“ I use Correspondence Analysis very much, because I think that it is essentially a relational procedure whose philosophy fully expresses what in my view constitutes social reality. It is a procedure that ‘thinks’ in relations, as I try to do it with the concept of field¹”.

Bourdieu's program for quantification and formalization is not an arbitrary result of historical contingencies: it is the logical consequence of a critical experience and reflection about the shortcomings of dominant quantitative approaches in social sciences, which led him to a conscious and systematic move toward a geometric frame-model more adapted to his conception of the social world.

In a first part, this communication describes Bourdieu's life-long commitment into statistics (quantification and formalization), which lead him to the choice of geometric modelling of data through Correspondence Analysis (CA) and multiple correspondence analysis (MCA).

In a second part, we stress the role of multidimensionality in this process, with the central example of “L'anatomie du goût/La Distinction”.

In a third part, we show that the notion of field which is developed by Bourdieu is constantly made operational through GDA, with a first example in “Le patronat”.

Then, in a last paragraph, after the examination of his last empirical work about French publishers, we try to infer from Bourdieu's practice a general Sociological Research Program based on the use of Geometric Data Analysis.

¹Preface of the German edition of *Le métier de sociologue*, 1991.