

A Small Graphic Lie. The Photographic Quality of Pierre Bourdieu's Correspondance Analysis

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Abstract : The problem of beautification is an obvious concern of photography, claiming reference to reality, but it also lies at the very heart of social theory. As we become accustomed to sophisticated visualizations of statistical data in pace with the development of software programs, we should not only be inclined to ask new types of research questions, but we also need to confront social theories based on such visualization techniques with new types of questions. Correspondence Analysis, GIS analysis, Social Network Analysis, and Perceptual Maps are current examples of visualization techniques popular within the social sciences and neighboring disciplines. This article discusses correspondence analysis, arguing that the graphic plot of correspondence analysis is to be interpreted much similarly to a photograph. It refers no more evidently or univocally to reality than a photograph, representing social life no more truthfully than a photograph documents. Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical corpus, especially his theory of fields, relies heavily on correspondence analysis. While much attention has been directed towards critiquing the somewhat vague conceptualization of habitus, limited focus has been placed on the equally problematic concepts of social space and field. Based on a re-reading of the *Distinction*, the article argues that the concepts rely on 'a small graphic lie' very similar to a photograph. Like any other piece of art, as Bourdieu himself recognized, the graphic display is a politically and morally loaded representation technique. However, the correspondence analysis does not necessarily serve the purpose he intended. In fact, it tends towards the pitfalls he strove to overcome.

Keywords : datavisualization, correspondance analysis, bourdieu, Field, visual representation

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