



Bourdieu, taste and the power of culture

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Order of things

- 1) Resumé of Pierre Bourdieu's work on culture
- 2) Issues of taste and cultural capital
- 3) A study of the UK: 'Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion' (CCSE)
- 4) Analysis of taste using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)
- 5) Analysis of taste using Focus Groups
- 6) Conclusions about class, capital and taste

1) Résumé of Bourdieu

- Biography
- Major works and questions
Education, culture, power
- Consumption in social science
- Main concepts:
habitus; capital; field; taste

habitus

- Highly contested concept
- Engrained, habituated dispositions, learned mostly in childhood
- Practical cf reflective responses to situations
- Dispositions structure and constrain action
- Habitus is a group (class) phenomenon

field

- Many fields
- Stakes are capitals: agents struggle for rewards which vary between fields
- Positions and the taking of positions generate disposition to act and limit capacity for success

Field is organised around

- 1) some particular stakes and commitment to the value of those stakes
- 2) a structured set of positions
- 3) a set of strategic and competitive orientations
- 4) a set of agents endowed with resources and dispositions.

Four types of capital

- Economic
 - Cultural
 - Social
 - Symbolic
-
- See 1986 essay

Cultural capital and taste

Cultural capital

- Concept of cultural capital coined by Pierre Bourdieu
- Defined as three types:
embodied, objectified and institutionalised.

3 ways that cultural capital affects inequality:

- Socialisation of children and its role in educational achievement; transmits privilege across generations
- Opportunities afforded by employment in the cultural industries
- The role of cultural capital in creating and expressing class differences; the strategic deployment of cultural capital and its conversion to other types of capital.

Distinction

- *Distinction* is the social alchemy whereby the powerful establish that what they like most is objectively best (that is to say aesthetically the most valuable) and then obtaining regard or respect from others for their good taste. On the basis of that good taste they achieve other forms of reward and privilege.

Taste as a weapon

Good taste is that which is legitimised and consecrated in a given social context. The consecration process is contested always, but it tends to follow the contours of wider social and political struggles. Dominant groups are served by their tastes being consecrated as good taste. The Bourdieusian argument is that 'judgment of taste', the judgment of judgments in other words, results in insidious and invidious modes of social classification. Taste plays a role in social classification, in symbolic struggle and in class formation. Taste is a weapon for drawing social distinctions and for exercising social and symbolic (class) domination.

Challenges to the distinction thesis

- in the name of democracy and equality,
- in the name of anti-snobbery,
- for its lack of respect for other cultures and of insularity (from a view-point of multiculturalism, for example),
- for ignoring progress, variety and development in the arts,
- for failing to appreciate the arbitrariness of universal aesthetic judgment (as in postmodern epistemologies),
- for violating the principle that taste is and should be a matter of personal choice rather than external, authoritative determination.

Broader objections to Bourdieu

- Concept of habitus is:
 - static;
 - not uniform across domains;
 - exaggerates role of family and class in socialisation
- Cultural, social and symbolic capital are metaphors, and not easily measurable
- Field also hard to operationalise and incompatible with habitus
- Legitimate culture has dissolved

3) CCSE

Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion (CCSE)

Tony Bennett , Mike Savage , Elizabeth Silva, Alan
Warde, Modesto Gayo-Cal and David Wright
with assistance of
Brigitte Le Roux and Henry Rouanet (U. of Paris V)

The project objectives

Survey examining the organisation and distribution of cultural practices, tastes and knowledge in Britain

- Show how cultural practices are distributed between class positions and consider the role played by the distribution of cultural practices in the organization of cultural capital
- Examine effects of changing gender relations in the household for how cultural capital is acquired, symbolised and transmitted
- Examine relative weight of cultural capital, compared with economic and social capital, in accounting for social exclusion
- Develop theoretical approaches to class analysis and new empirical means to understand class divisions
- Review relevance of cultural capital for cultural policy

Research Questions

- Does Bourdieu only fit France 1960s?
- Are there strong patterns in a world of variety and individualisation?
- Is there still a high or legitimate culture?
And are the dominant class attached to it?
- Are there other strategies besides distinction for using cultural capital?
- Is the problem exclusion?

Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion

ESRC-funded project *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion: A Critical Investigation*

- 25 focus-group discussions;
- national random survey (1754 respondents);
- and 44 semi-structured household interviews with selected survey respondents and partners.

exploring the cultural tastes, forms of cultural participation and cultural knowledge

Content of questionnaire

Cultural domains of taste

Television

Films

Reading

Music

Visual Art

Sport

Eating out

Activities

General recreation and leisure

Collections and possessions

Learning skills and accomplishments

Appearance and embodiment

Attitudes to cultural consumption

Table 1 Items on scale of tastes. Per cent who like selected items

	Mean (%)
Films of Rathnam	0.6
Films of Campion	2.2
Einstein on the Beach (Glass)	3.3
Paintings of Kahlo	3.8
Religious books	8.5
Heavy Metal music	10.8
Modern Jazz	12.0
Watching World Cup football on TV	44.4
Wonderwall (Oasis)	46.6
Work of Picasso	48.8
Paintings of Turner	50.5
Paintings of L.S.Lowry	54.5
Chicago (Sinatra)	64.7
Paintings of Van Gogh	67.3

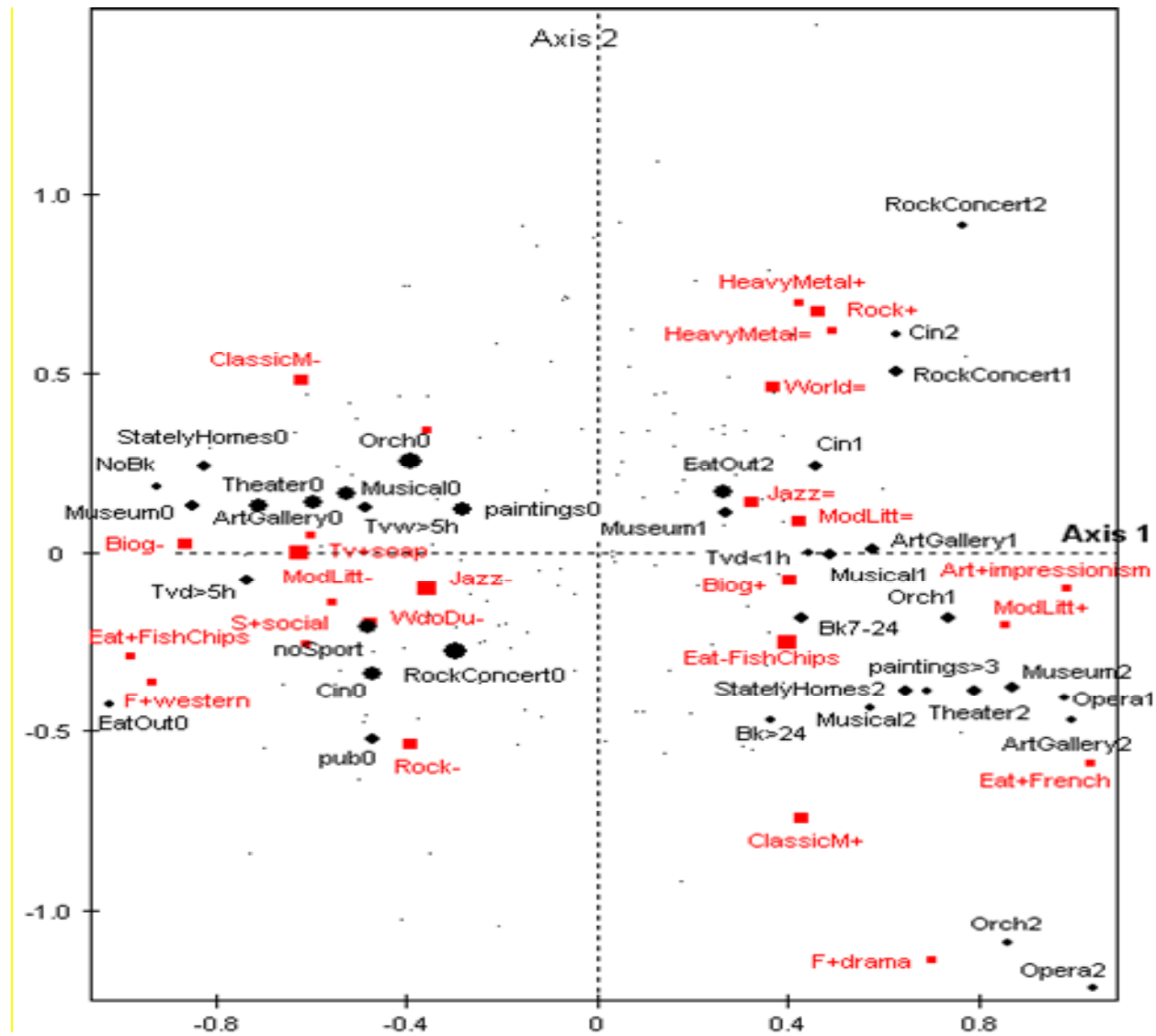
Table 1 Knowledge, likes and dislikes of 39 cultural items.

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	Hitchcock	95	24	34	-10
	Bergman	57	26	7	+19
	Campion	17	8	2	+6
	Almodovar	8	3	3	0
	Rathnam	6	4	1	+3
Musical works	Chicago	92	17	65	-48
	Four Seasons	80	6	56	-50
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	Religious	100	66	9	+57

MCA and Taste

- Multiple correspondence analysis (like Principal Components Analysis)
- Applied to survey data
- Locates cultural items (modalities) on axes and can read groupings of taste on basis of distances
- See the circulated paper (though technically now superseded)

Axis 1 ($\lambda_1=0.1626$): Cultural Engagement: involvement and disengagement



Black: participation modalities
 Red: taste modalities

12 occupational groups

Employers in large establishments and Higher managerial positions (L1/
L2)

Higher professional occupations (L3)

Lower professional and higher technical occupations (L4)

Lower managerial occupations (L5)

Higher supervisory occupations (L6)

Intermediate occupations (L7)

Employers in small establishments (L8)

Own account workers (L9)

Lower supervisory workers (L10)

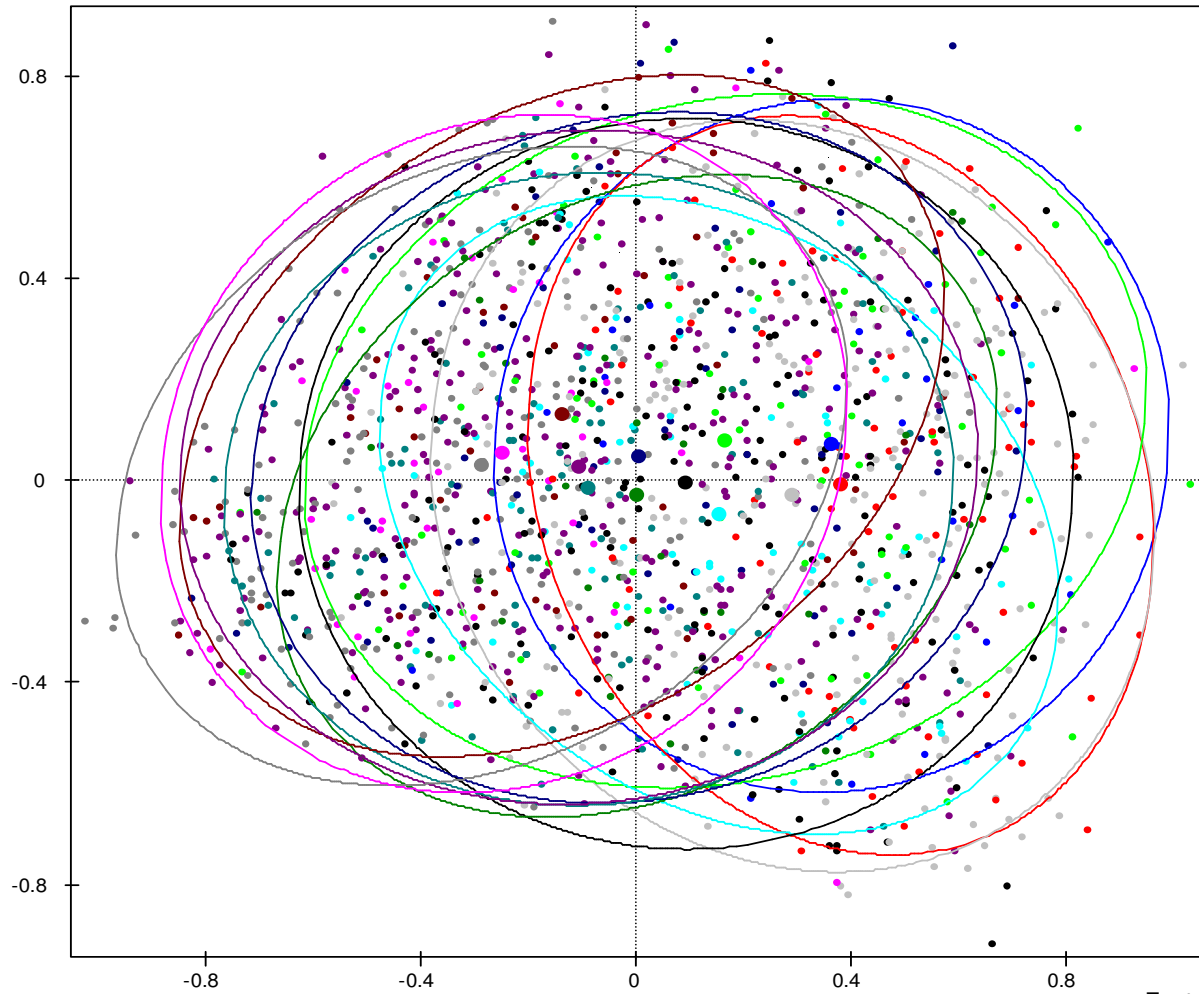
Lower technical workers (L11)

Semi routine occupations (L12)

Routine occupations (L13)

12 occupational classes, plane 1-2

Factor 2 - 3.86 %

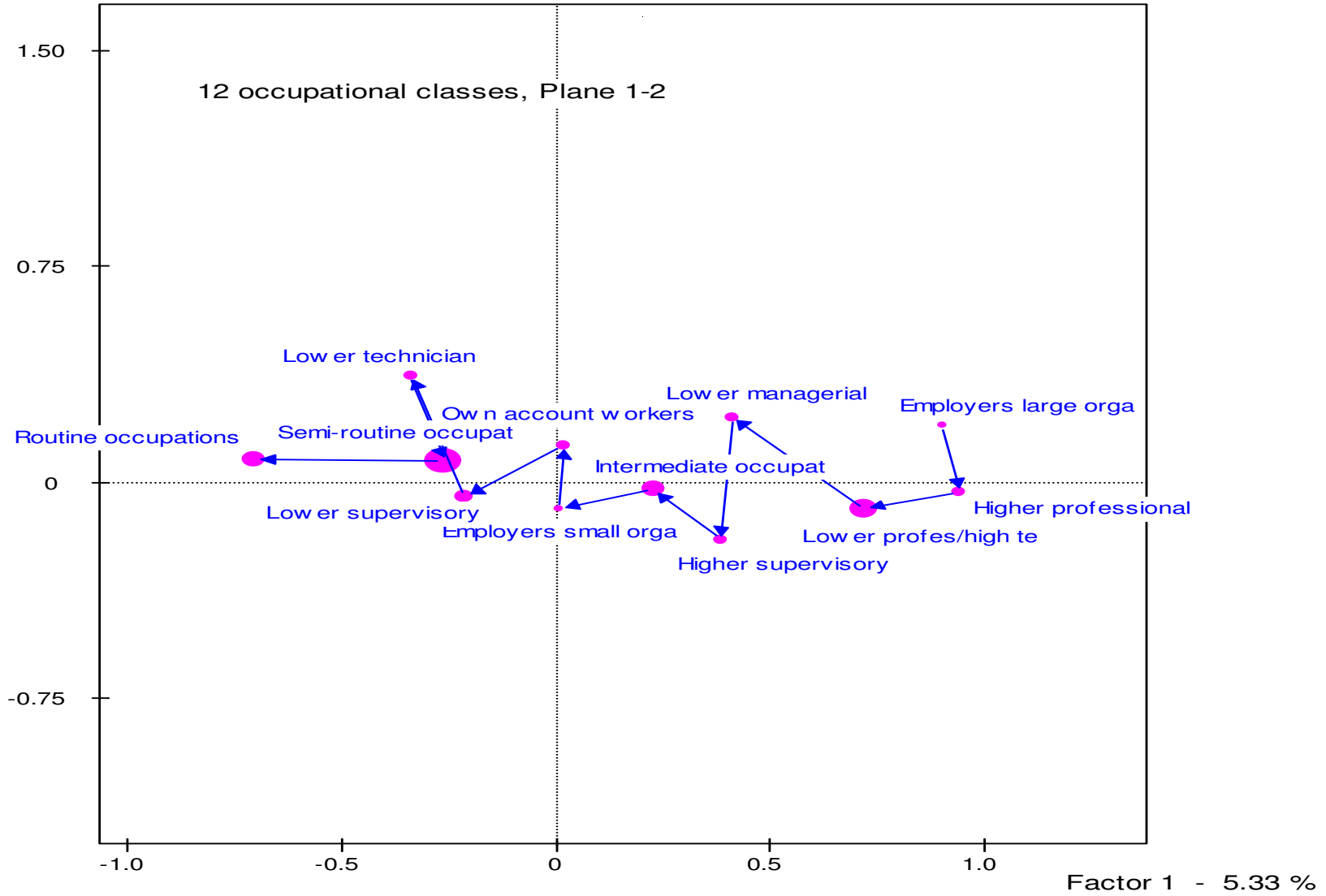


SocialClass12			
	count	ecc.	area
Employers large orga	29	0.41	1.35
Higher professional	91	0.66	1.32
Lower profes/high te	237	0.52	1.56
Lower managerial	77	0.56	1.67
Higher supervisory	72	0.66	1.20
Intermediate occupat	192	0.07	1.64
Employers small orga	36	0.63	1.30
Own account workers	68	0.45	1.54
Lower supervisory	121	0.40	1.33
Lower technician	53	0.69	1.43
Semi-routine occupat	311	0.45	1.55
Routine occupations	198	0.64	1.31
Never worked	41	0.48	1.34
DK	3		

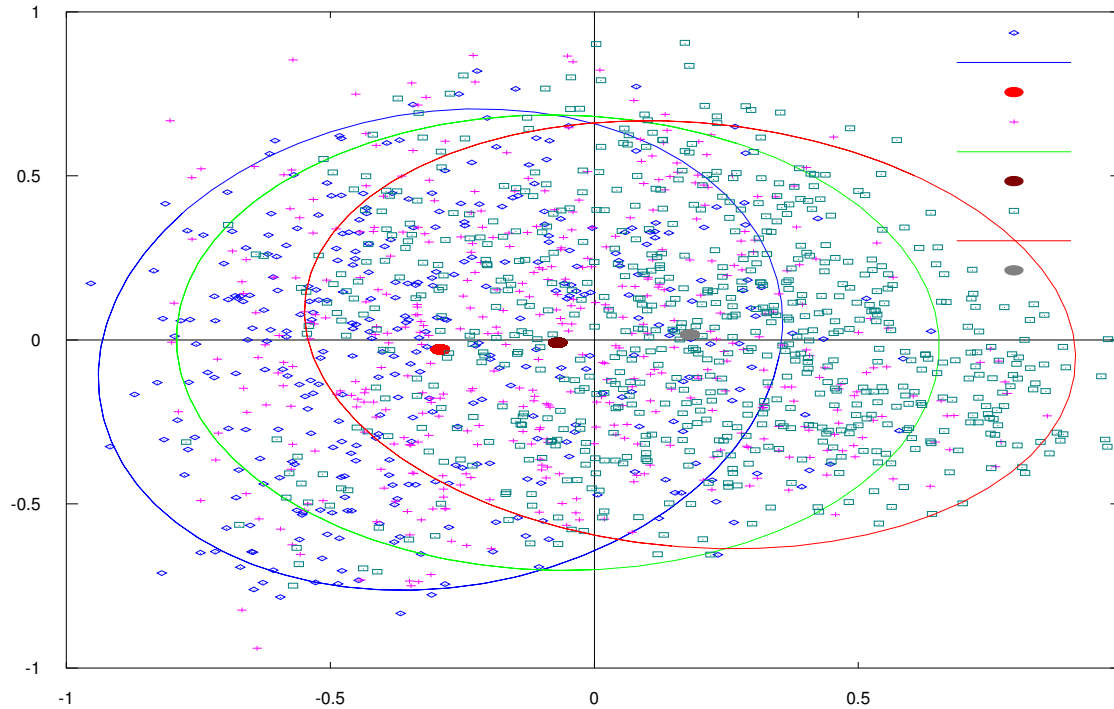
Factor 1 - 5.33 %

12 Occupational Classes, Plane 1-2

Factor 2 - 3.86 %



Plan of axes 1-2 : distribution of individuals by class in the space of lifestyles



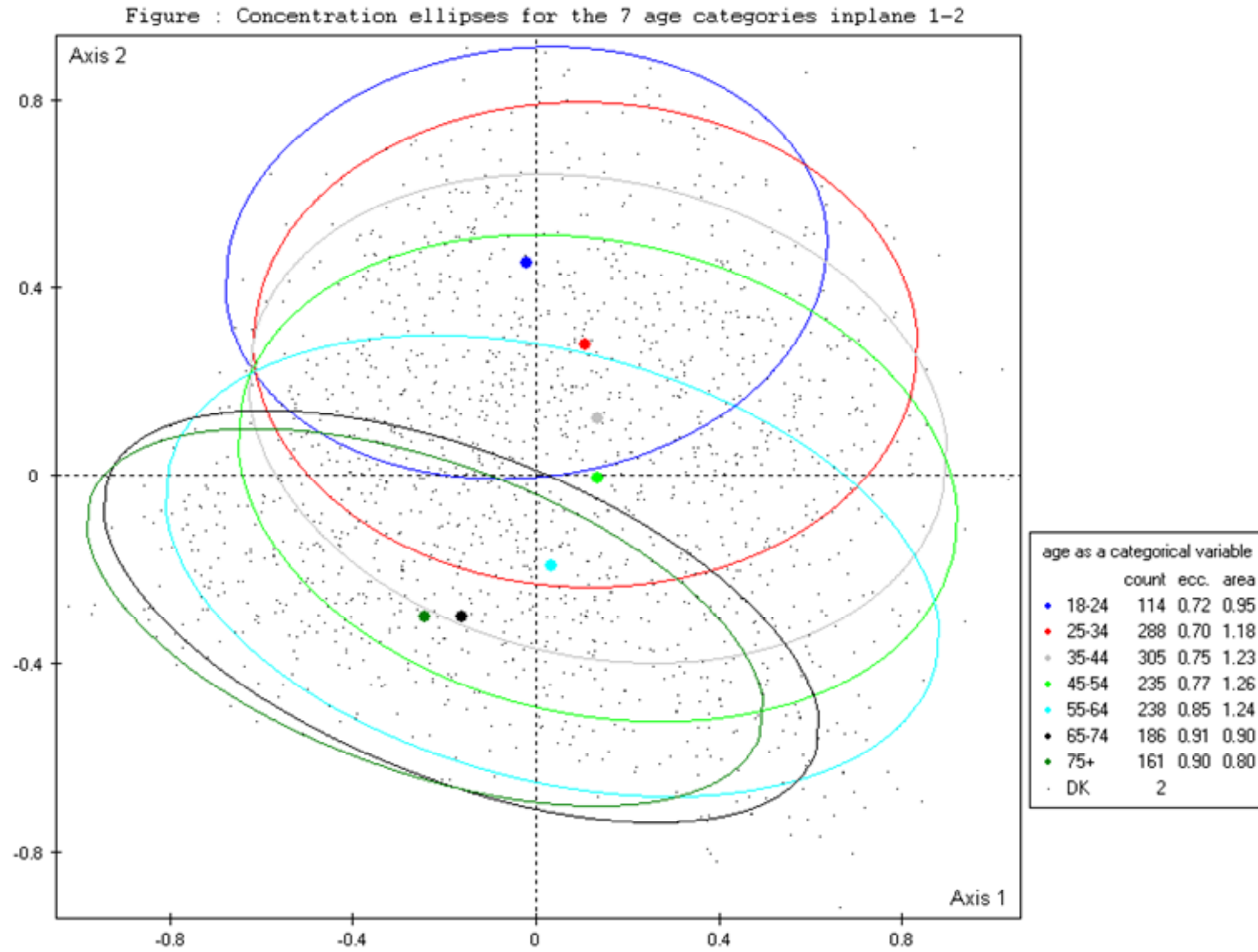
Key

Red ellipse : professional class
Green ellipse : intermediate class
Blue ellipse: working class

Selected cultural activities by three social classes (percentage for each class)

	Professional class	Intermediate class	Working class	All
More than 5 hours TV per weekday	8	22	33	24
Once a year or less to cinema	33	52	62	53
Never go to musicals	19	35	60	31
Read no books last year	8	14	27	19
Sometimes goes to opera	10	4	3	5
Sometimes goes to orchestral concerts	22	12	7	12
Never goes to orchestral concerts	42	64	80	67
Sometimes goes to nightclubs	21	20	23	22
Never go to museums	15	33	50	39
Never goes to art galleries	30	52	69.	55
Goes to pub at least once a week	29	29	30	29
Soap operas favourite TV programmes	10	16	22	17
News/current affairs favourite TV programme	24	19	14	18

Figure: Deviation and concentration ellipses for age groups in plane 1-3



Class and age, Plane 1-2

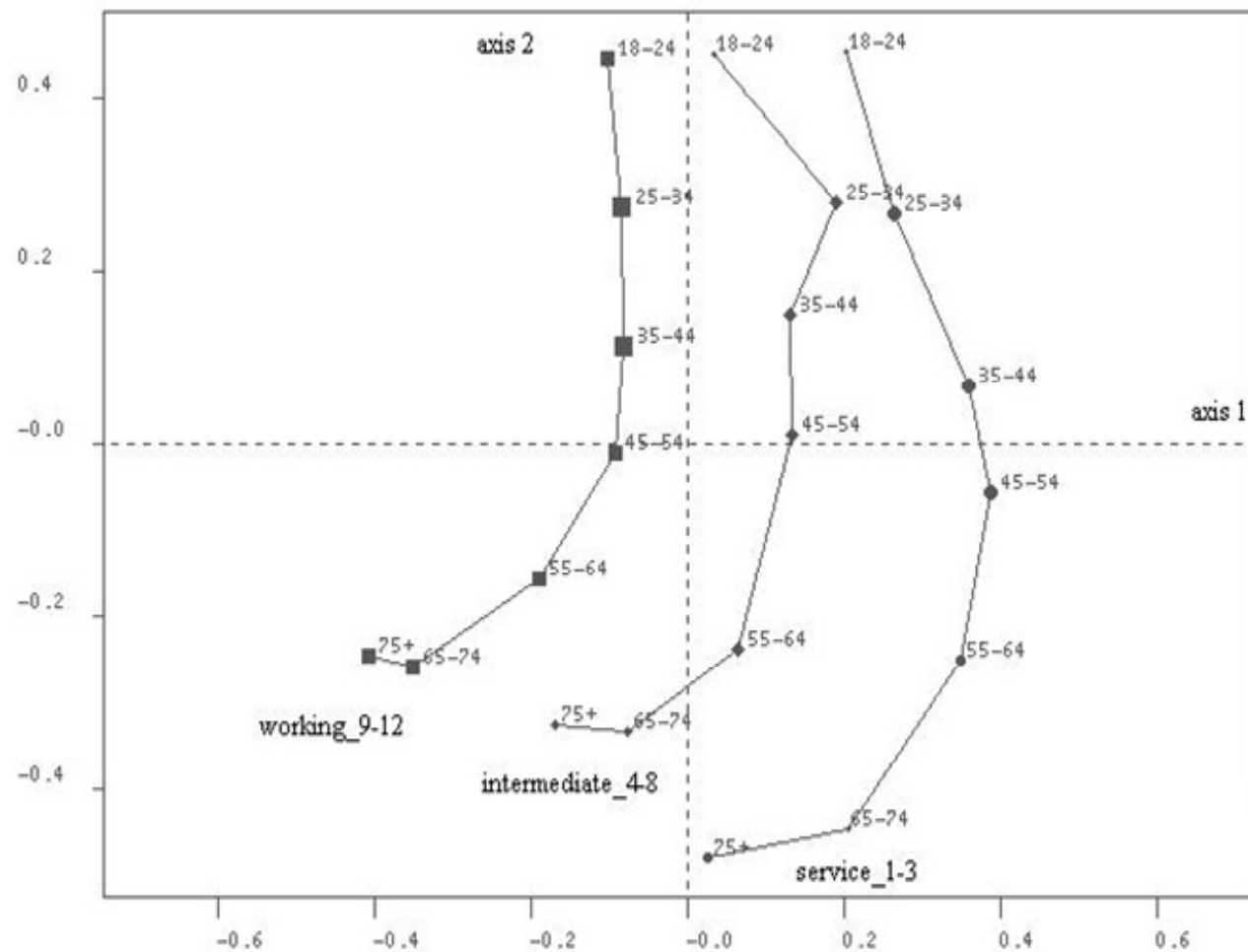
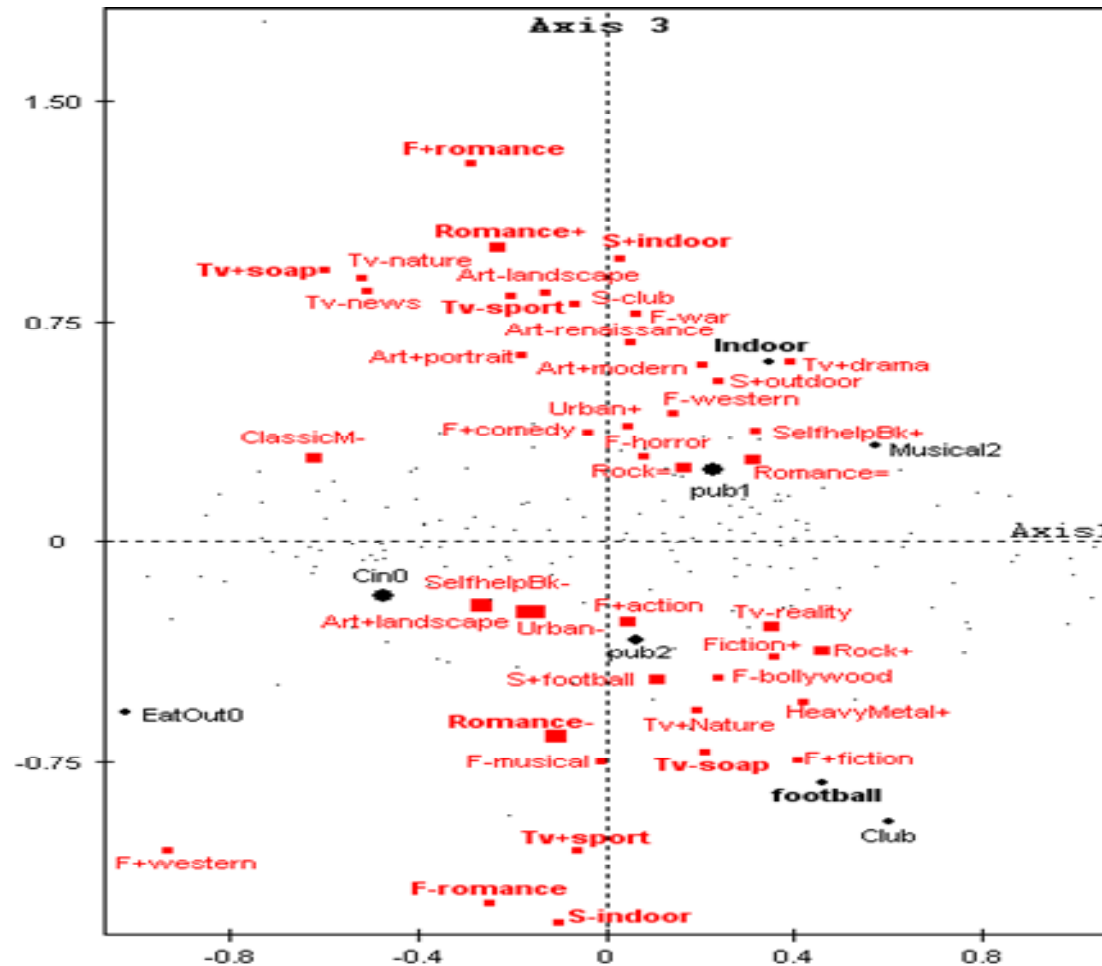


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Axis 3 ($\lambda_3=0.0727$): Vicarious Sympathies : hard and soft

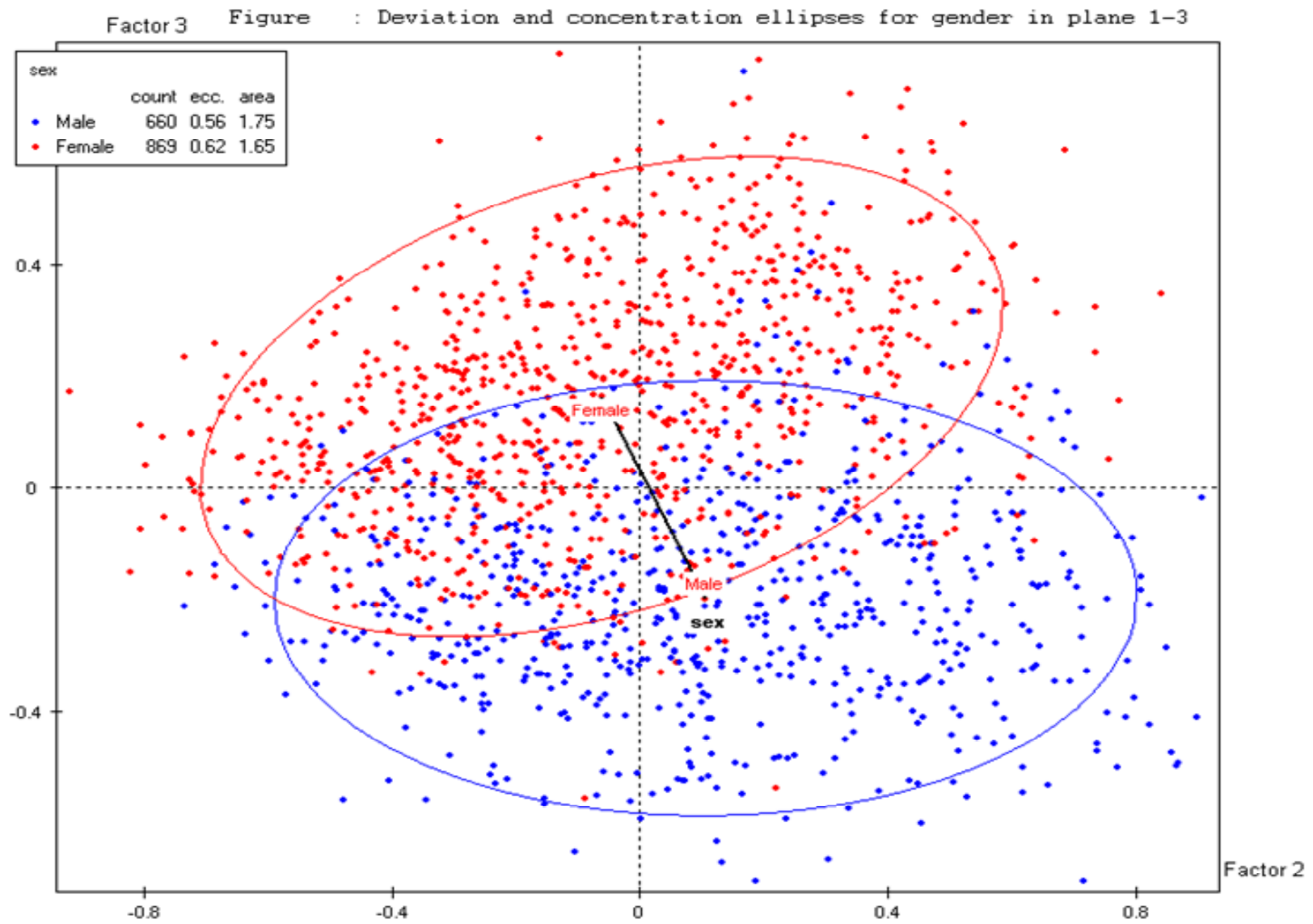


Black: participation modalities

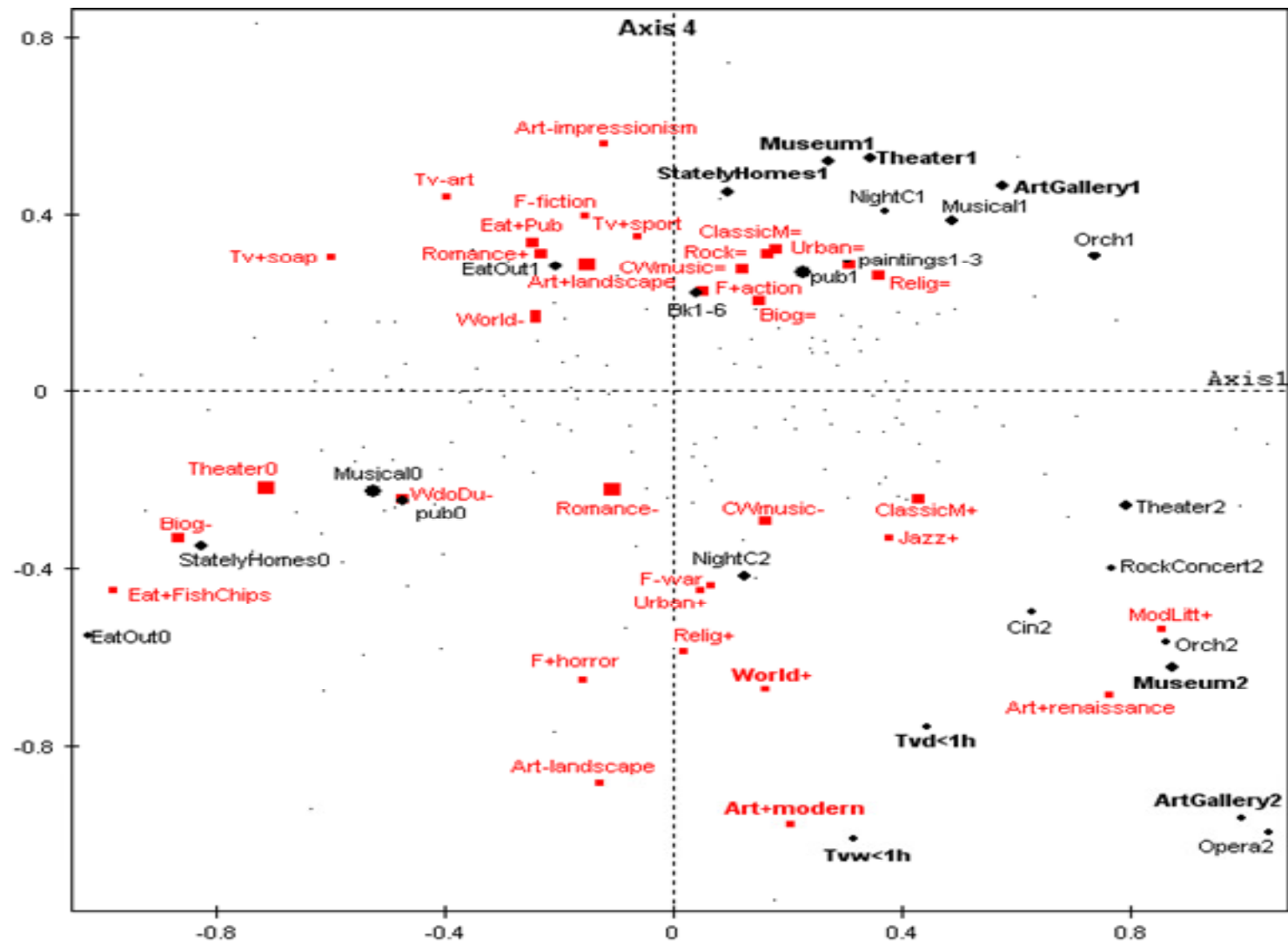
Red: taste modalities

Bold: modalities contributing most to variance on the axis (>2)

Figure: Deviation and concentration ellipses for gender in plane 1-3

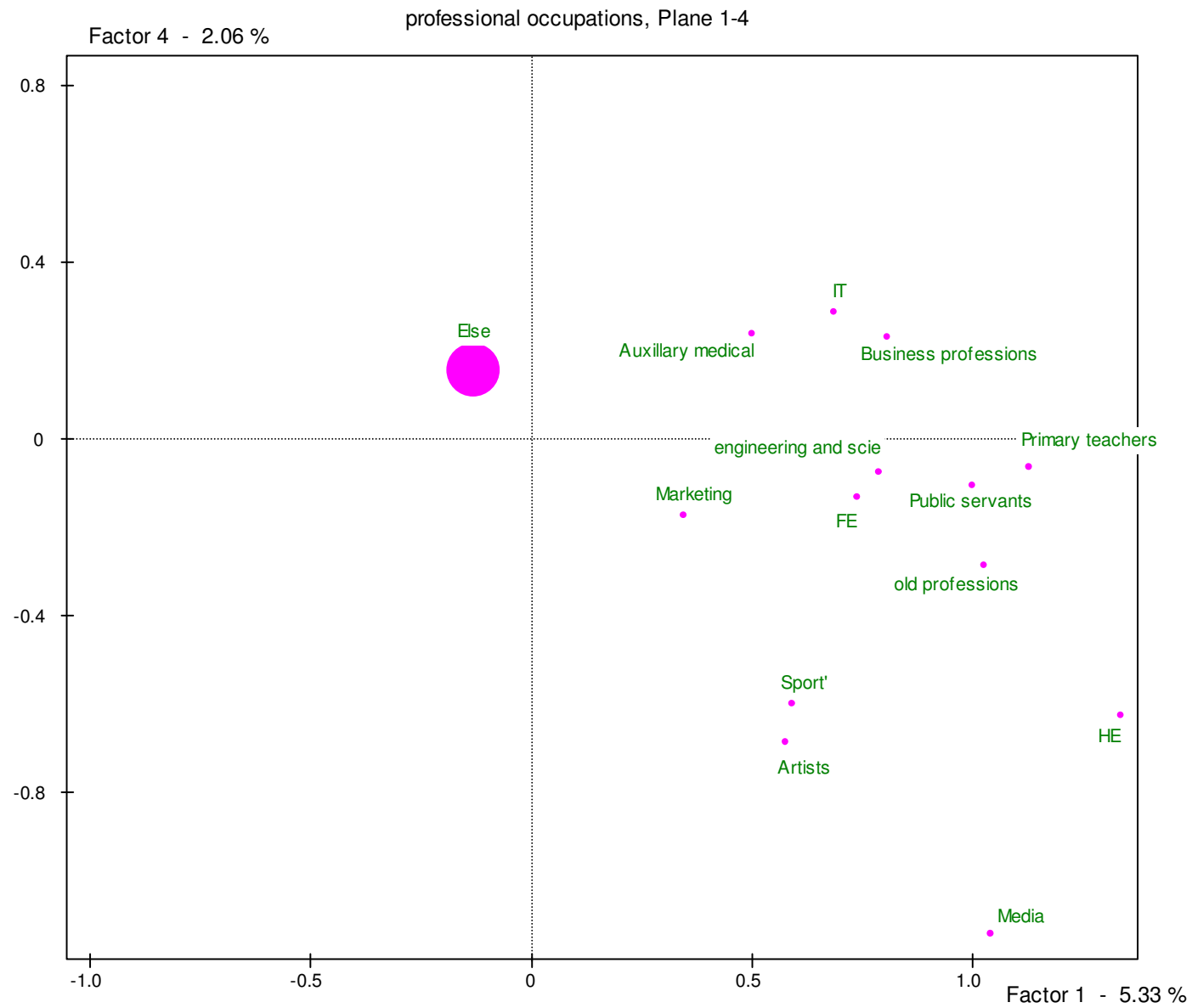


Axis 4: ($\lambda_2=0.0629$) Cultural Enthusiasm: moderation and voraciousness

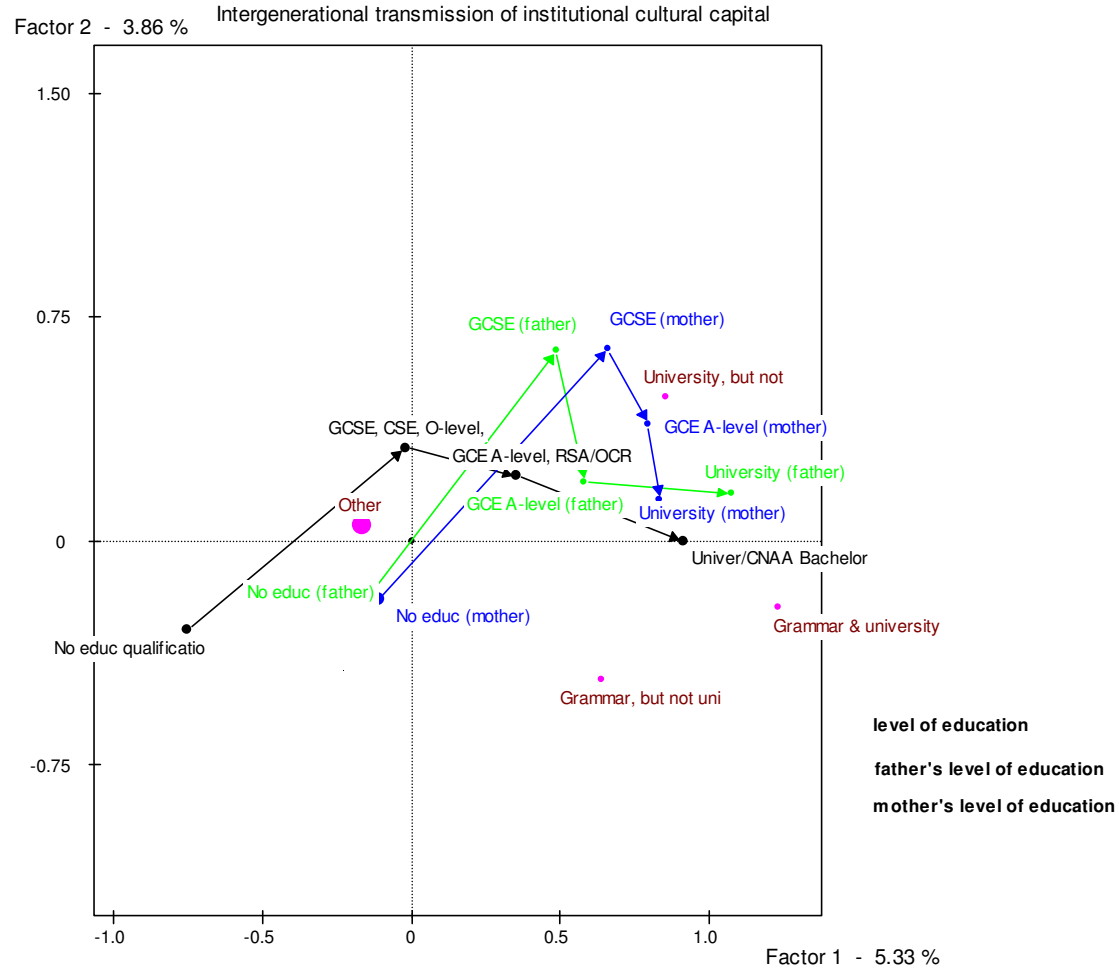


Black: participation modalities
 Red: taste modalities

Grouped Professional Occupations, Plane 1-4



Inter-generational transmission of institutional cultural capital, Planes 1-2



Father's highest qualification and respondent's educational experience, Plane 1-4

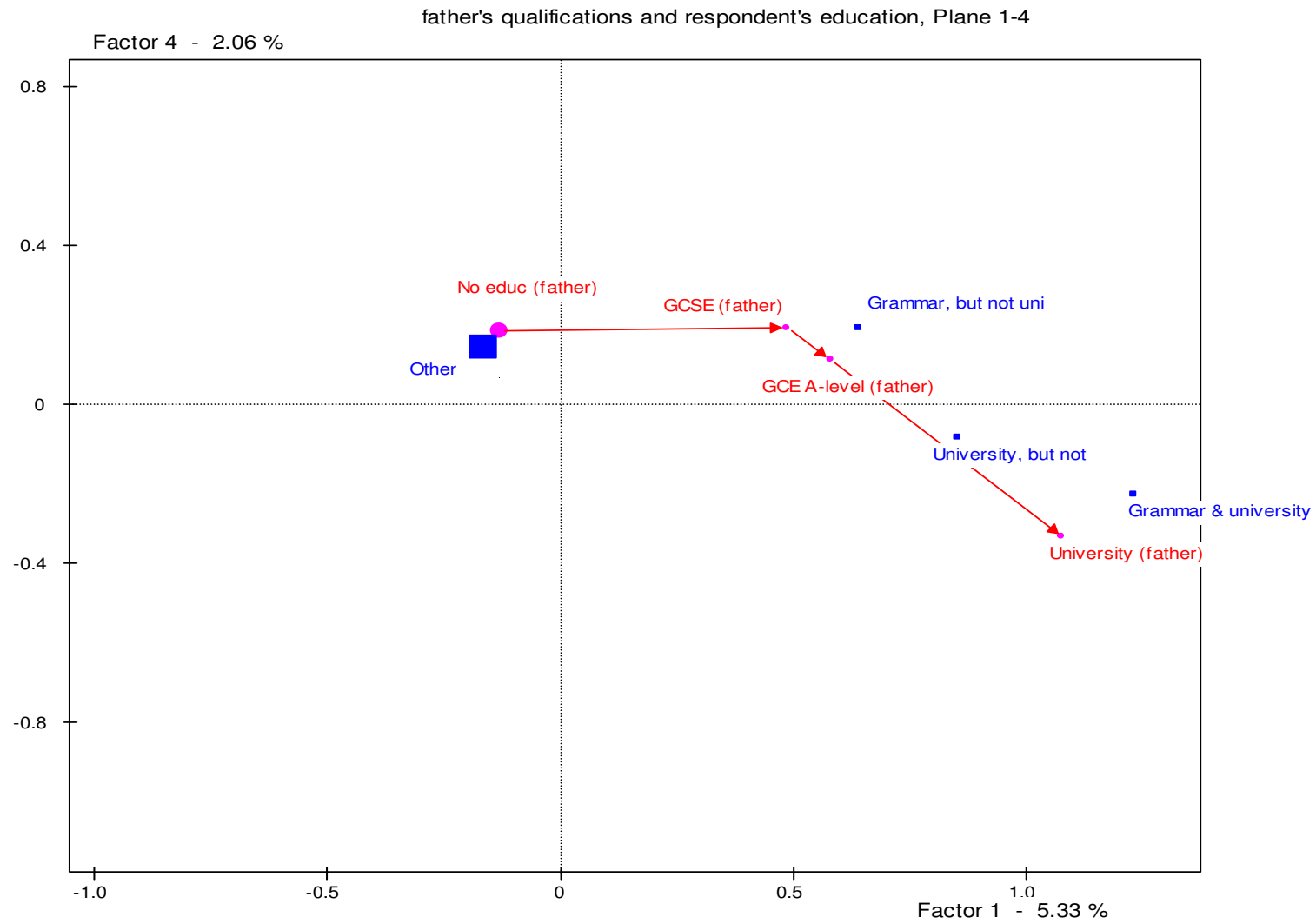


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MCA conclusions: 1

- Professional class marked by its participation
- Senior managers & professionals distinct group
- Generational variation in taste
- Professional class has more legitimate tastes and more tastes (an omnivorous orientation)
- Not strongly divided internally
- No overt cultural hostility – but echoes of past distinctions
- Visible pattern of inter-generational transmission of cultural capital

MCA conclusions: 2

- Class matters.
- Class society continues to transmit privilege across generations.
- Divisions between professional, intermediate and working class.
- Educational qualifications homogenise the professional class.
- Cultural capital as basis of social cohesion within professional class?
- No simple distinction between high and popular culture but attendance at Arts performances continues to show hierarchical class gradient.

MCA conclusions: 3

- MCA is a useful technique
- It can be complemented by qualitative analysis – interviews and focus groups

4) Analysis of taste using focus groups

Taste as a weapon

Good taste is that which is legitimised and consecrated in a given social context. The consecration process is contested always, but it tends to follow the contours of wider social and political struggles. Dominant groups are served by their tastes being consecrated as good taste. The Bourdieusian argument is that 'judgment of taste', the judgment of judgments in other words, results in insidious and invidious modes of social classification. Taste plays a role in social classification, in symbolic struggle and in class formation. Taste is a weapon for drawing social distinctions and for exercising social and symbolic (class) domination.

Focus Groups

1. Rural service workers
2. Gay men
3. Retired middle class
4. Retired working class
5. Lesbians
6. Black middle class
7. Landowners
8. Skilled manual workers
9. Low paid women
10. Pakistani middle class
11. Pakistani working class
12. Supervisors
13. Young professionals & students
14. Unskilled workers
15. Benefit claimants
16. Agricultural workers
17. Black working class
18. Indian middle class
19. Indian working class
20. Professionals, cultural industries
21. Self employed
22. Professionals
23. Women Professionals
24. Business elites
25. Managers

Questions

- what do people think taste is?;
- is there a hierarchy of tastes – are some practices and items more legitimate than others?;
- does the social distribution of taste matter to people?;
- to the extent that there is a hierarchy, some recognition some items or practices are more valuable than others, how do those who espouse the higher tastes justify their preferences?

Taste is (mostly) personal but also social

Everybody's different (FG1)

It depends on the individual person (FG1)

It's whatever you feel comfortable with (FG2)

What is one person's good taste is another person's bad taste (FG3)

Good taste is something you like which pleases you, and bad taste is something which offends. (individual ie, but there are also some common moral standards revealed elsewhere) (FG3)

It (good taste) is the sort of thing you like to think you have got yourself. On the other hand it is arrogant really (FG3)

I think there is still benchmarks, and I think we do actually, deep down still think that there's good taste and there's bad taste. We may not be honest about it. (FG6)

So taste is:

- Sometimes an attribute of an item
- Sometimes a procedure of judging
- Sometimes something one possesses (whether innate or a cultivated capacity to judge)
- Sometimes a standard (ie, objective)
- But most usually personal preference

Good and bad taste: aesthetic and moral dimensions

Good taste has few, if any, substantive characteristics. Bad taste is primarily defined in terms of moral harm. Being 'offensive' is bad taste.

Specific examples of what is bad taste varies from group to group:

- Mushes and Gareth Gates (FG08)
- Dying hair ginger and breakout (FG02)
- Charlie's Angels and Big Brother (FG20)
- Abba and Eastenders (FG13)
- Adverts and offensive behaviour on the TV, said to corrupt children (FG09, FG04)
- News of the World (FG06)
- Bad etiquette (the sucking of the teeth) (FG06 middle class Afro-Caribbean)
- sex and swearing on the TV
- Humour 'if it's racist or sexist, it will be in bad taste, because it's not socially acceptable. (FG02)
- A joke of Paul Merton about the Queen Mother's teeth (FG03)

Tolerance and Standards of Aesthetic Taste

I revel in my bad taste now, whereas before, I pretended I didn't have it'
FG13/1165

There are some things like that I'm aware aren't in particularly good taste, like
Eastenders FG13/1167

'I probably see them (boy bands) as bad taste but not really worth worrying
about' 13/1163 'as you know they're gonna pass' FG13/1165

'We're surrounded by ideas of what's good taste and what's bad taste. David
Lean's good art, Coronation Street isn't. I'm still influenced by that, though
since I've been 'educated', done a degree, I try to question that in myself'
FG21/290

Alison: I'm very well read but I will also sit down and watch some Big Brother
or I'll also go surfing on the internet for some tacky gadget that I don't
need....

Jo: 'I do feel guilty if I watch crap' ' I feel so guilty, I feel terrible, what
am I doing' (FG24)

The disavowal of snobbery: Social tolerance

‘I often worry they [colleagues] think I’m a snob and think... it’s [“the stuff they watch on TV and all the soaps”] beneath me and I’m, not like that at all, I mean I’m just not interested in this Big Brother person or whatever’... (FG25)

‘Are we ready to sit here and actually judge what other people’s opinions are’? (FG02)

‘I don’t see a problem of dismissing something as crap’... ‘There is a snobbish arbiter that says of you really can’t be associated with that’ (FG22)

‘I think some people would look down on us a lot’ (FG08)

‘There’s a lot too much judging going on in the world’ (FG08)

‘I disagree totally with art’ (FG12)

‘The old snobbery once associated with cultural taste has now but disappeared’:

	Per cent %
Strongly Agree	1
Agree	26
Neither agree or disagree	23
Disagree	45
Disagree strongly	4
Don't know	2
N =	1564

Evidence from focus groups

Signs of change:

- no longer admissible to be thought snobbish
- nor is pretentiousness acceptable
- a common norm - refusing to see cultural differences as indications of hierarchical social distinction
- widespread aversion to claiming some cultural items are intrinsically better than others
- no clear or strong sense that some items are in good taste
- terms good and bad taste infrequently used in everyday discourse
- contentious to impugn the tastes of other individuals or groups
- most 'judgments' are made in a simplified aesthetic register.

Standards and Tolerance

Tastes of others are to be tolerated;

‘What is one person’s good taste is another person’s bad taste’

Nevertheless,

‘I think there are still benchmarks, and I think that we do actually, deep down still think that there’s good taste there’s bad taste. We may not be honest about it’.

Younger and higher educated reject universal judgement:

‘I revel in my bad taste, whereas before I pretended I didn’t have it’.

Antipathy to turning aesthetic judgements into judgements about social worth. But it is perceived to happen.

There is much less tolerance in relation to moral harm, or moral bad taste. Those things can be condemned, and by implication so can their perpetrators.

Aestheticisation and the emergent class of cultural intermediaries

- FG20 (Professionals in the cultural industries)
- **Defining bad taste as ‘covering issues which are really sensitive in a really insensitive way’**
- **Fashions and changing taste**
- **How the same item can be ‘tacky’ or ‘cool’ in different contexts (including possibility of treating items ‘ironically’)**
- **‘High culture’ and ‘low culture’**
- **Possibilities of shame and embarrassment in admitting to preferences**
- **Being a ‘traitor’ if engaged in the arts and then spending time in popular pursuits: ‘Working in the arts, you know that there are all these wonderful things out there for you to experience and you’re spending your free time going to watch Charlie’s Angels’.**

The retreat of class?

The language of class is in retreat. But 49 per cent of the population think that snobbery still exists.

‘I often worry they (colleagues) think I’m a snob’.

‘There’s a lot too much judging going on in the world’.

- There is still a self-congratulatory to middle class cultural self-understanding
- There is still a sense in which working class people are made to feel uncomfortable because of their exclusion from a full range of cultural activities
- There are class-based differences in the mode of appropriation of cultural forms.

Institutions and the consecration of Culture

Institutional change

- the delivery of formal cultural capital
- postmodernist thought destabilising cultural value, part of scepticism of intellectual authority
- hegemony of the notion of consumer sovereignty and individual choice.
- commodification of culture and its subjection to the logic of market competition

The argument

- 1) Taste is a practice of perception.
- 2) Processes of legitimisation and consecration not operate as Bourdieu predicted.
- 3) Not because individuals more reflexive, nor because of their resistance.
- 4) Institutional transformation of the organisation of consecration: ie, institutions of consecration no longer clearly objectify cultural quality to facilitate social classification.
- 6) People became loathe to turn aesthetic differences into judgments of social or moral worth.
- 7) The role that Culture plays in the reproduction of hierarchical social order is not exactly as anticipated by Bourdieu.

6) General conclusions

- Bourdieu continues to have value, but requires modification
- UK is not identical to France of 1960s
- Distinction not arise solely from command of legitimate culture
- Culture still contributes to domination