Relational Theory

Relational theory

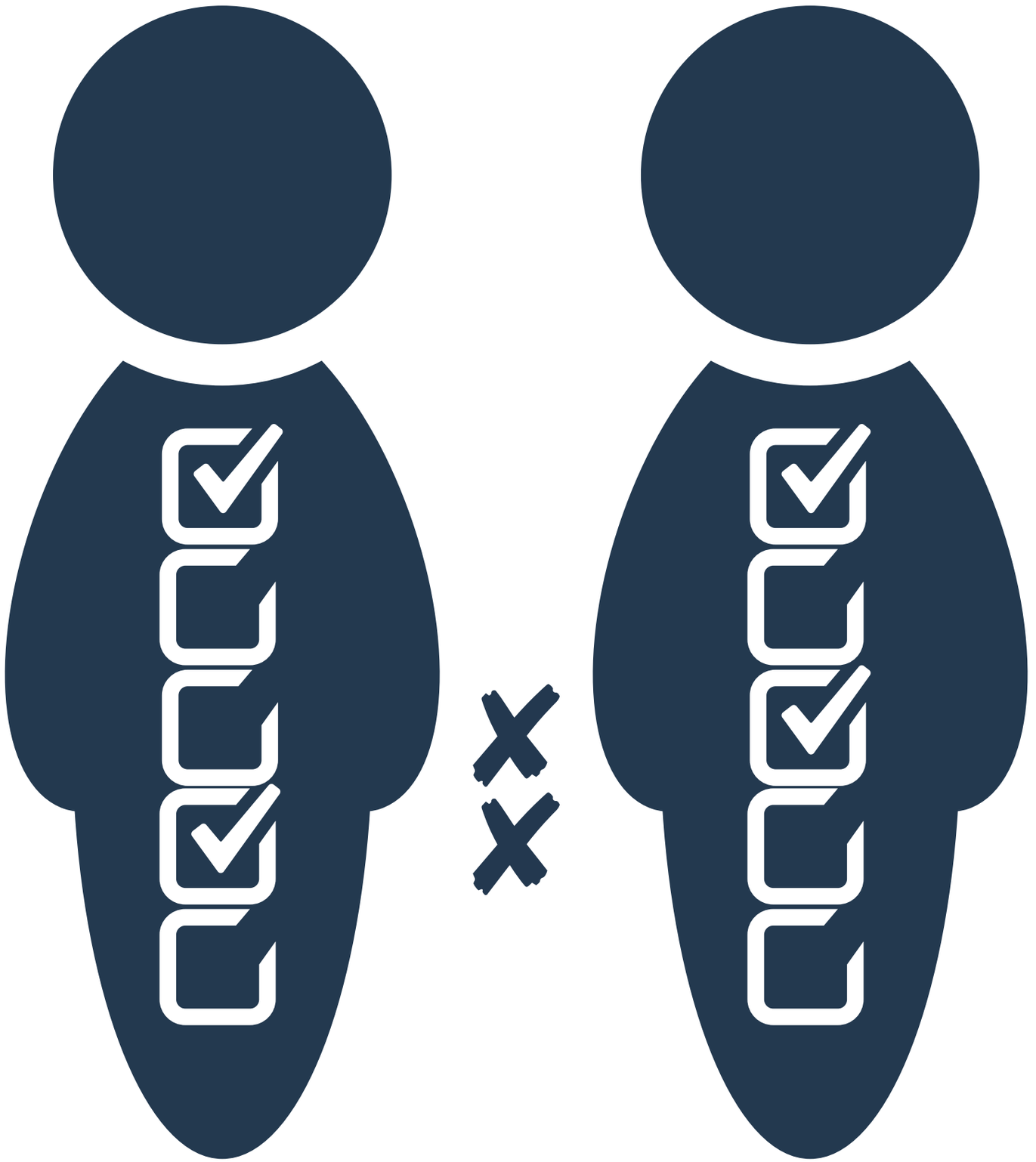
Social structures as *contrasts*

Substantialist approach
(dominant in social sciences)

- People are defined by their individual resources, preferences, and characteristics
- Substance of an individual is independent of context

Relational approach

- People are defined in *contrast* to one another
- Individual characteristics meaningful only in how they differentiate people
- Cannot understand a person outside of their social and cultural context



Relational theory

Fields

Culture and structure create each other

- Peoples' tastes depend largely on, e.g. their socioeconomic class
- Class boundaries are realized through cultural and normative orientations

Fields as substrate

- Field theory provides one way to reconcile this duality
- Metaphor from physics (electric field, magnetic field, etc)

Fields contextualize class and culture

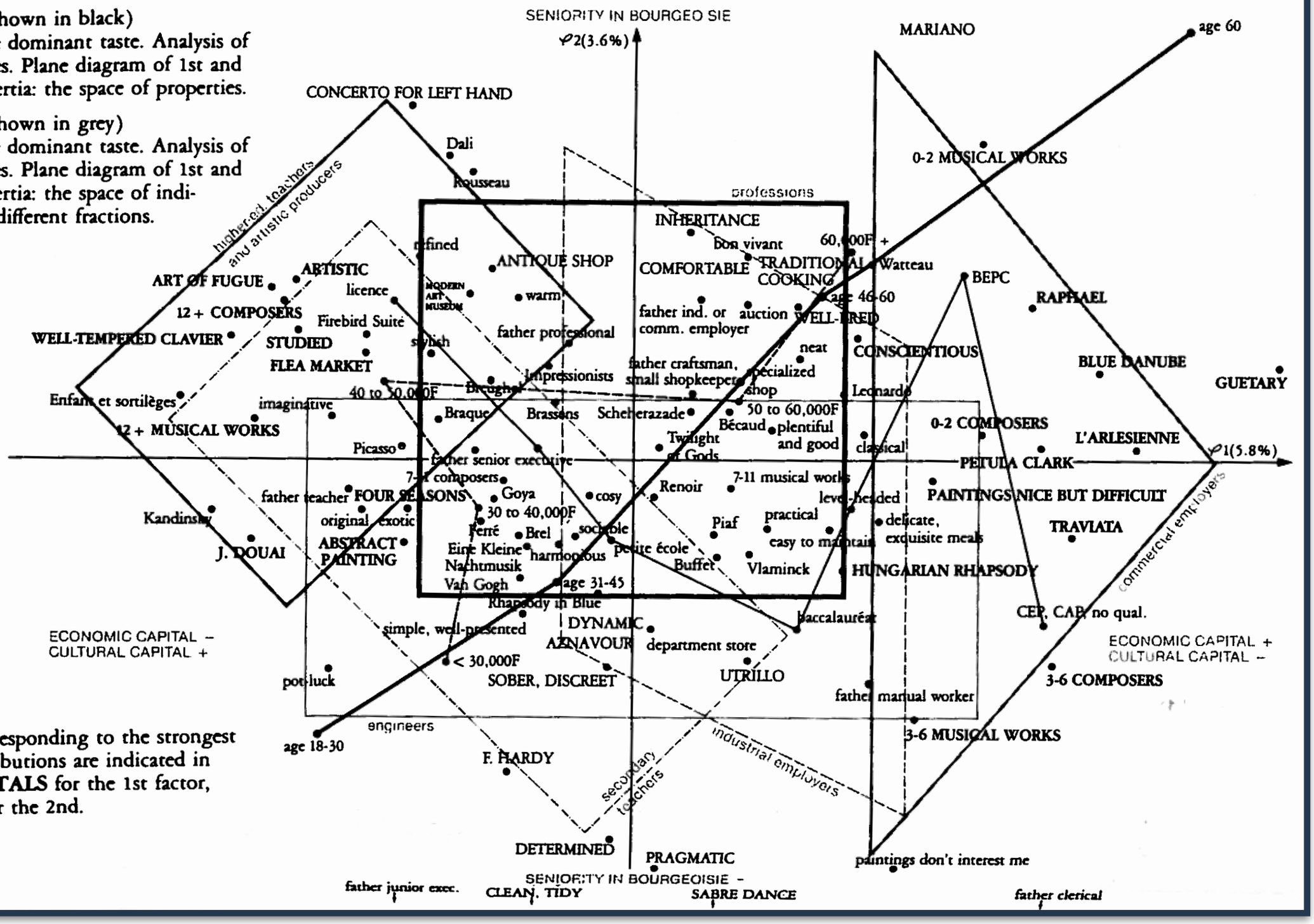
- Relate people to people, people to tastes, and tastes to tastes

Social structure is inextricable from class, culture, norms, etc.

Bourdieu's fields

Figure 11 (shown in black)
Variants of the dominant taste. Analysis of correspondences. Plane diagram of 1st and 2nd axes of inertia: the space of properties.

Figure 12 (shown in grey)
Variants of the dominant taste. Analysis of correspondences. Plane diagram of 1st and 2nd axes of inertia: the space of individuals of the different fractions.



The items corresponding to the strongest absolute contributions are indicated in **BOLD CAPITALS** for the 1st factor, CAPITALS for the 2nd.

Figures 11 and 12 from
Bourdieu, P. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.
Harvard University Press, 1984.

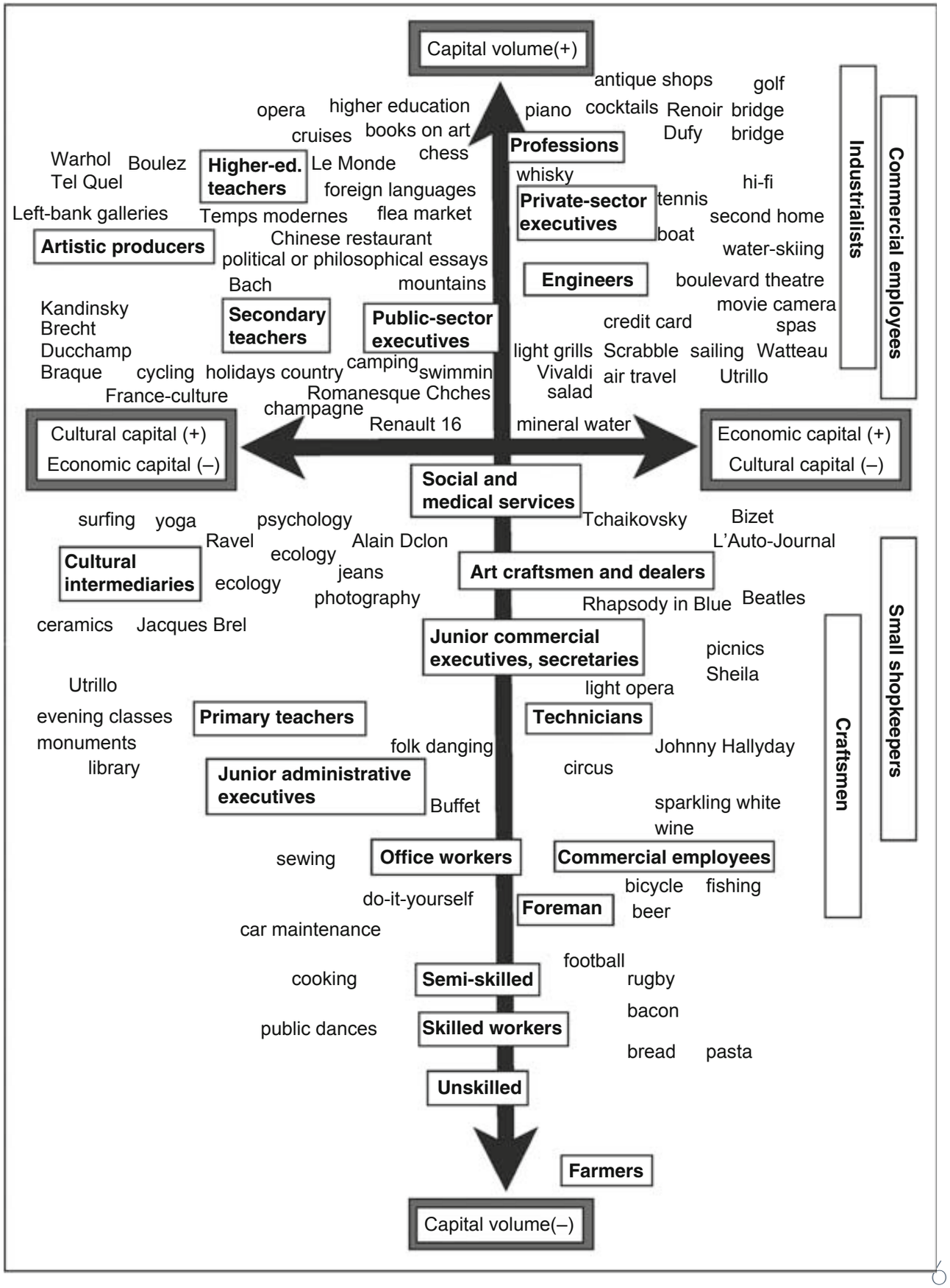
Bourdieu's fields

Forms of capital

- Bourdieu viewed fields and relations in terms of economic and cultural *capital*
- People and their tastes are embedded in a field
- Mapped according to *capital composition* and *capital volume*

Correspondence analysis

- Mathematical/statistical method to turn information collected from people into a relational, spatial representation



Bourdieu's fields

Correspondence analysis

Tastes as signs

- Social structures, cultural and economic consumption, etc are embedded in a field
- Surveys on taste can reveal relational structure

Dimension reduction

- (Multiple) correspondence analysis is a way of reducing high-dimensional data to two-dimensions
- E.g. the data on the right is 5 dimensional
- Reduced representation tries to keep similar people close to each other

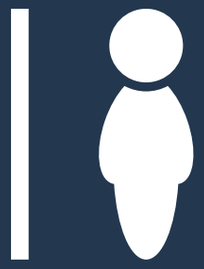
	Lunch		Beverage		
	Samosa	Hotdog	Coffee	Tea	Water
1	1	0	0	0	1
2	1	0	1	0	0
3	0	1	1	0	0
4	0	1	0	1	0
5	0	1	0	0	1
6	1	0	0	0	1
7	1	0	0	0	1
8	0	1	1	0	0

Correspondence analysis: an example

To illustrate correspondence analysis, please take this (short) survey:

https://kutt.it/tastesonline

Image credit



person by asianson.design from the Noun Project

Checkbox by Adrien Coquet from the Noun Project

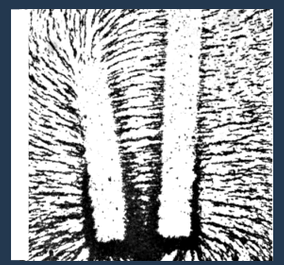


Photo: Frank Eugene Austin via Wikimedia