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## Traditional vs. Modern Art: The Status and Network Antecedents of Visual Art Preferences

*Abstract:* Sociologists traditionally focus on the power of socio-economic variables as drivers of aesthetic tastes and cultural practices, leaving other important factors outside the purview of analysis. As a remedy, this article makes use of recent progress at the intersection of the sociology of culture and network theory to show that individual interest in and preferences for art are also embedded in social relationships of a different kind. Data from a specially designed survey on personal networks and cultural tastes in Polish society is analyzed. Cultural taste is measured in detail by presenting respondents with ten color illustrations depicting different styles of visual art. These ten evaluations are then reduced to two significant dimensions (traditional vs. more modern art). The regressions analyses show distinct relations of network characteristics (such as heterogeneity, type of contacts, density, or associational membership) with the type of art preferred. The findings are interpreted in terms of social influence and affinity between cultural orientations (e.g., openness) and the manners in which social ties are developed and maintained. Additionally, the article sheds light on distinction patterns by arguing that status is claimed through specific (modern) preferences.

*Keywords:* visual art, preferences, social networks, status, social capital, position generator

### Introduction

Although highly specialized, the subfield of the sociology of the arts has contributed much that is central to core sociology. Investigations of artistic engagement have fostered our understandings of the diversity of social phenomena, including, for instance, the processes of social change and social reproduction, the role of objects and practices as status markers, and the use of cultural objects and texts as media for constructing everything from individual identity to social movements and national heritage (Acord and DeNora 2008). As is observable in such seminal texts as Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982) and Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), the cornerstone of the discipline seems to be that sociologists of art see themselves as "unmasking" the assumptions, values, and ideologies implicit in art-world practices, among which "essentialism" (seeing artworks as special kinds of object) and "idealism" (treating artists as "gifted" individuals and art perception as a "pure" or "disinterested" gaze) are predominant (de la Fuente 2007). Bourdieu (1984; 1993; Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991) attacks both these tendencies, demonstrating the social, economic, and political factors that intrude on the supposedly "pure" or autonomous field of art production and consumption. In his view, the denial of the social is central to the art system's mode of operation. Artists and intellectuals, having special interests in the field,

do not want to admit that fame, fortune, or power underlie their creative decisions, much as consumers do not want to recognize that seeing artistic contemplation as a spiritual and disinterested activity is a class-based form of distinction. It follows that sociologists do not try to define absolute features of “the artwork” (as performed in empirical aesthetics) or the concept of art in general (as intended in the philosophy of aesthetics) but rather focus on either the context of production and dissemination—subsumed under the category of the “art field,” “art system” (Golka 2013), or “art world”—or the beholders, with their socio-demographic characteristics and processes of perception, to gain insight into what constitutes art (Tröndle, Kirchberg and Tschacher 2014).

Since the publication of Bourdieu and Darbel’s *The Love of Art* (1991/1966), the socio-economic stratification of art audiences seems to have been the dominant observation angle in many studies. The most striking and consistent characteristic across countries and times is the high position of art museum visitors on different scales of social inequality, including in regard to their occupation, income, and especially education (e.g., DiMaggio and Useem 1978; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Silva 2006, 2008; Berghman and van Eijck 2009).<sup>1</sup>

The consistency of the elite nature of fine-arts audiences is usually explained by Bourdieu’s theory of art perception and social reproduction (1984, 1993; Matuchniak-Krasuska 2010). Bourdieu envisions art perception as a mediate deciphering operation, meaning that artworks carry a message which can be decoded and understood. Simultaneously, the ability to decode and subsequently appreciate these works is not a matter of pure and spontaneous aesthetic judgment but a product of privileged social conditions marked by the level of social, cultural, and economic capital. “A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (Bourdieu 1984: 2). The “love of art” is thus not love at first sight, as it arises from cultural competence and special dispositions acquired and inculcated in the family and in an educational system that is often inaccessible to less powerful sections of the population. Consequently, only those with high levels of cultural capital feel at home with “esoteric” culture (e.g., modern art) and display an understanding of the language needed to talk about it, whereas those with low levels of cultural capital are disenfranchised and feel out of their depth (hence, the common phrase, “it’s not for the likes of us”) (cf., Newman, Goulding and Whitehead 2013). The command over some forms of culture is not socially neutral as patterns of consumption and lifestyles are active devices of sustaining and legitimizing inequalities. Access to higher social and professional circles is granted or restricted according to an individual’s capital, that is, knowledge of the culture and mores of the dominant class, and this kind of social reproduction is the more effective the more it takes on the patina of grace (natural talent)—of culture turned into nature. Being unable to invoke the right of birth, “the bourgeoisie find naturally in culture as cultivated nature and culture that has become nature the only possible principle for the legitimation of their privilege” (Bourdieu 1993: 234).

Holders of a high volume of cultural capital, whose social being is most removed from the urgencies of material life, are the most likely to perceive art in a truly artistic manner, that is, to transcend the schemes and codes of everyday perception and appreciate the for-

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<sup>1</sup> Similar findings are reported in Poland (cf., Drozdowski et al. 2014; Bachórz et al. 2016).

mal aspects of art (as required for the appreciation of non-figurative/abstract/avant-garde art). On the other hand, representatives of lower social strata, who are devoid of means of legitimate appropriation, tend to apply the most accessible schemes and codes, which are appropriate for everyday reality, to artworks, thus explaining their wish for realistic representation in art and their strong preference for functional aspects of works of art (such as emulating reality, or being entertaining or edifying) (Bourdieu 1993).

Although Bourdieu's legacy is a milestone in sociological inquiry into art and an unmissable frame of reference for many followers, his ideas have not remained unchallenged. Some skepticism is shared by scholars adhering to the so-called "omnivorousness" thesis (cf. Peterson and Kern 1996), according to which cultural tastes and practices are open and fluid rather than tightly attached to specific groups, as consumers undertake and appreciate a diverse range of styles. While fruitful in fuelling intellectual debate within cultural sociology, the notion of omnivorousness suffers from a lack of clarity, having become pervaded with many divergent meanings (as a sign of the progressive decline of sociocultural hierarchies, a new form of social distinction, or a device of extending communicative competence) (cf., Warde, Martens and Olsen 1999; Cebula 2013).

Another line of criticism raised in art-audience studies, is that simply conceptualizing museums as predominantly middle-class institutions—whilst true enough—is inattentive to the variety of ways in which these cultural spaces are experienced and runs the risk of slipping into a kind of class reductionism (Hanquinet 2013a, 2013b). To grasp the cultural diversity among museum visitors (e.g., their different visions of art), it is necessary to bracket out the usual determinants of aesthetic orientations and to insert museum attendance into people's daily life. Visiting an art museum does not mean anything in and of itself but can only be interpreted if contextualized within the entire set of visitors' practices and tastes (i.e., their "cultural profiles"). This approach gains in value if we consider the re-configurations of cultural capital brought about by the evolution of the artistic and cultural field: the proliferation of different aesthetics or cultural repertoires that order and give meanings to practices and tastes, and the evolution of the art museum from a static upholder of high culture to a more spectacle-oriented, popular, and commercialized venue akin to a shopping mall (Prior 2005; Hanquinet, Roose and Savage 2014). Currently, people can draw on many more principles to classify tastes and practices than before (Cebula 2018), which produces a fractioning of art audiences and a proliferation of ways of preferring (Daenekindt and Roose 2017).

In the same vein, Koen van Eijck (2012) and P. DiMaggio (1996) have argued that moving beyond the "usual suspects" i.e., gender, age, and education, by adding cultural variables that tap horizontal rather than vertical social differentiation, may be helpful for gaining a better understanding of the ways in which people engage with culture. The idea underpinning their studies was that visual art appreciation and cultural participation are embedded in the wider structures of meaning or values to which people adhere. K. van Eijck (2012), for instance, examined the impact of religious identity and social orientations on appreciation for classical/figurative and modern/abstract visual art styles and found out that they both matter. As we learn, independent variables were better predictors for modern preferences, arguably because more contemporary artworks attract a more specific public. Those works (of abstract art, surrealism, and conceptual art) were particularly unattractive

for people with more traditional values (approximated by communitarianism) or people who did not feel very comfortable in today's society (as evidenced by a high score on social disorientation and social isolation scales). It took a more liberal, playful, independent stance to appreciate those modern works, as could also be gathered from the positive effects of atheism and education. In summary, we can say that more traditional values do not go well with modern art.

This is in line with the findings of DiMaggio's study (1996). Seeking the difference between U.S. art-museum visitors and their non-visiting counterparts, the author found that the former were somewhat more secular, trusting, politically liberal, racially tolerant, and open to other cultures and lifestyles, and much more tolerant and interested in high culture than the latter (even after adjustment for the effects of age, education, income, race, and gender). The nature of that phenomenon was captured by a neo-modernization frame of reference, according to which the values and attitudes typical of museum visitors represent "a distinctly *modern* disposition, evincing, first, a faith in progress and in scientific (and artistic) authority; and, second, an open, cosmopolitan orientation to both people and cultures" (DiMaggio 1996: 161). In other words, there is some affinity between art museum attendance (and probably, cultural participation as a whole) and a modernist (and even postmodernist) worldview and the temperament that it epitomizes. It follows that artistic participation is not solely a form of cultural capital and an emblem of social distinction (as expressed by Bourdieu, 1984) but also a component of a modern, secular, cosmopolitan way of thinking, which may serve the function of establishing identities in a shifting social context and linking oneself symbolically to a variety of groups and networks (DiMaggio 1987). The open and cosmopolitan orientation that characterizes art museum visitors (and, more generally, much of the educated upper-middle classes), when trained on the social horizon, may facilitate the acquisition of social capital in the form of new relationships and access to new social networks. This same orientation, when extended to artistic genres, could provide access to cultural tools useful in making such social connections (DiMaggio 1996: 177).

These last conclusions are of great importance for this article as in it I adopt a network-analytic approach to the domain of culture (and art). As argued above, until now sociologists have traditionally focused on the power of socio-economic variables as drivers of art preferences and participation, leaving other determinants outside their purview. However, though in its early stages, a growing body of literature on the mutual links between the characteristics of social networks and cultural tastes (Erickson 1996; Lizardo 2006, 2013; Kane 2004; Puetz 2015; Cebula 2015) has shown the promising explanatory potential of network variables, without other factors such as class, education, or income. The current analysis presents a picture of art consumption that complements (rather than replaces) that provided by previous studies.

A central concern of the article is the embeddedness of individual preferences for art in the relationships of family life, organizational life, and friendships, because, I will argue, the way in which people are connected provides a context that frames their engagement with visual art. Inspired by ideas from P. DiMaggio (1987), especially the contention that classification in art (and in culture) is a response to a structurally generated demand for symbols of distinction and group affiliation, and that familiarity with cultural items (including the arts) may serve as a currency that facilitates interaction across a range of contexts and

networks, I empirically address whether tastes in, and engagement with, the visual arts are still related to socio-demographic characteristics and to the status of beholders, as well as being structured by their personal social networks.

To that end, in the next section I introduce the terms “social capital” and “social networks” and invoke different conceptualizations and theories to demonstrate their significance to our understanding of art participation and preferences. A review of the main theoretical stances and prior empirical investigations on the mutual relationship between cultural and network variables lays the groundwork for new hypotheses, which I then explore by using the data from a large-scale survey conducted in Wrocław (Poland) in 2017. After discussing the main findings, I conclude by discussing some of the implications, the limitations of the current effort, and possibilities for future research.

### **The New Path of Research on Cultural Participation— Toward Social Network Theories**

Recent research at the intersection of the sociology of culture and network theory has argued for, and provided empirical evidence for, two general propositions. The first is that larger and more diversified networks are connected to the variety of cultural items and activities consumed (to “omnivorousness”); the second is that cultural variety is connected to the possession of weak social ties or ties that span larger distances in social space (DiMaggio 1987; Lizardo 2006, 2013; Kane 2004). On the basis of cultural consumption in the security industry in Toronto, B. H. Erickson (1996) concluded that people with varied connections (measured by social class diversity) know more about different types of culture and develop omnivorous tastes that allow them to communicate with a maximum number of people in other groups and that that relationship gets stronger as the tie considered gets weaker. According to M. Granovetter (1973), weak ties are here conceived as “bridges” that link individuals to other social circles, thus giving them access to information and resources not likely to be available via strong ties. Although Erickson presumed the causal priority of network variety for cultural variety, we can acknowledge that both mutually reinforce each other, as cultural omnivores are likelier to find a common interest that can support an initial relationship, and those with large, heterogeneous networks are introduced to a greater variety of new cultural goods. That both processes are at work has been the subject of recent studies (Puetz 2015).

In summarizing research on the empirical question of why individuals have a relationship with people similar to themselves (known as the “homophily principle”—see McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001), scholars have mostly provided one of two plausible answers. According to the selection explanation, people are attracted to and form relationships with individuals with whom they have something in common. On the other hand, social-influence or diffusion-process explanations underline that people learn about new consumer goods or acquire new cultural pursuits from pre-existent relationships and become more similar to people in their personal networks over time. Actually, both models find confirmation in empirical material (e.g., Kandel 1978). K. Lewis, M. Gonzales, and J. Kaufman (2012), for instance, have shown that two students who prefer certain genres

of movie (“dark satire” and “raunchy comedy/gore”) and music (“lite/classic rock” and “classical/jazz”) are significantly more likely than chance to form online ties with each other, while diffusion only occurs with reference to one genre of music (“classical/jazz”). As Lizardo (2006, 2013) wrote, deep-rooted metaphors of social networks as “the infrastructures of society” caused theorists to see social networks uncritically as material, stable, and causally efficient. This so-called “traditional network model” has recently been contested on two grounds: (a) acknowledgement that social relationships are themselves culturally constituted and (b) empirical evidence that network structure is itself fluid and constantly shifting (Puetz 2015). Both paved the way for analyses prioritizing the effects of taste preferences on social network formation. This new approach implies additional questions. If cultural tastes and orientations are “network opportunity structures,” how do people mobilize them to form their personal environment? At least two general mechanisms are considered. First, consumer goods or cultural content provide material for conversation rituals at the micro-level (Collins 2004; Lizardo 2016), which generate an emotional energy that eventually solidifies into social relationships. Second, consumer goods and behaviors (especially “conspicuous” or visible ones such as clothes, posture, manners) work as an “interactional hook,” a clue which others can treat as signalling the relevant membership category. It is theorized that individuals have affective, snap-judgement reactions to others’ self-presentational styles and use these automatic cognitions to establish their personal networks (Vaisey and Lizardo 2010; Puetz 2015).

Shifting our concern to the domain of art, an open question to be explored here is why we might expect art preferences and interest in art to be associated with the parameters of personal networks. The assumption that tastes in art (which are rather marginal in identity formation and as a topic of casual conversation, excluding specific groups of art lovers) may exert a formative influence on someone’s connections seems to be unlikely and counterintuitive. Therefore, it is necessary to provide some possible explanations (Kane 2004). First, it may be hypothesized that network heterogeneity increases the odds of exposure to less accessible “high culture” pursuits, as it increases the chances of including a member tapped into another network that circulates high-culture knowledge, who might then serve as a conduit of this taste to the ego (Kane 2004: 108). If that is the case, interest in art should be heightened if we maintain contacts with people occupying higher social positions (with the “cultural elite”). Second, an ability to appreciate art may be the effect of certain dispositions (or even of personal traits, such as openness to experience or extraversion—see Krajewska and Waligórska 2015) acquired and inculcated through exposure to specific configurations of ties, which are more diverse, sparse, and outward-oriented. In other words, some habits forged by communicating with different others (such as tolerance, sensitivity to other ways of thinking) may translate into the habit of decoding more “arcane” culture (that is, it could lead to the desire for culture that is not immediately decodable). In contrast, residing in more homogenous, closed networks (see below), in which communication is more restricted and context-bound and where a large portion of information and resources is shared, would seem to work against a taste for complex, ambiguous art. The network configuration is seen here as having an effect on (or being a part of) habitus (to use a term from Bourdieu’s theory), that is, the system of lasting, transposable dispositions of perceptions, appreciations, and actions (Bourdieu 1984). Note that this hypothesis is at

odds with the most recent understanding of networks as rather an effect than a cause of our cultural profile (Lizardo 2006). Finally, both art participation and diverse, open, less confined networks may indicate the more general orientation (e.g., cosmopolitanism) of which both are components. As was suggested by DiMaggio (1996), art museum attendance was associated with an open, tolerant, trusting orientation, an expansive cosmopolitanism, and faith in scientific (and artistic) authority, all making up a distinctly modern disposition.

The role of social networks in art consumption would be better captured if we refer to the term “social capital” and the theories in which it is embedded. While the concept has been applied to a wide range of actions (e.g., job searching and promotion, occupational status attainment, human capital creation) (Burt 1992; Lin 2001; Coleman 1988), and to both research macro levels (as economic development and resolving collective action problems—Putnam 2000; Sabatini 2007) and micro levels (well-being, health), there is a converging consensus that the core idea of social capital is that social actors (individual or collective) can accrue resources (symbolic and material) and secure benefits (intentionally and unintentionally<sup>2</sup>) by virtue of membership in social networks, groups, or other social structures (Portes 1998). In this vein, Bourdieu (1997: 51) defined the concept as “the the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (...).” What this definition makes clear is that social capital is formed of two elements: first, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and second, the amount and quality of those resources. This approach led to two conceptualizations of social capital. Depending on theoretical preferences, the main emphasis of scholars was either on social resources (that is, the resources accessible and mobilized for actions through a person’s direct or indirect ties—Lin 2001; Van Der Gaag, Snijders 2005) or on social connections, that is, locations in a network (e.g., being a broker), or on the characteristics of networks and ties (e.g., density, closure, size, strength of ties) (Burt 1992, 2001, 2004; Marsden 2012). A disagreement begins when social capital is made concrete, with networks being models of what it means to be “better connected.” Whereas Coleman (1988) adhered to the closure argument that social capital is created by a network of strongly interconnected elements guaranteeing effective sanctions, trust, and the circulation of information, R.S. Burt (1992, 2001, 2004) opted for the opposite situation. In his view, there are rather sparse networks or networks with “structural holes” that create competitive advantages for individuals and enable them to achieve better social positions. Structural holes emerge when people’s networks are rich in non-redundant contacts, that is, contacts that are not connected to one another or that do not lead to the same sources of information (Burt 1992). The benefits of such connections are derived from early access to diverse and non-overlapping sources of information and resources, and from exercising control over people occupying opposite sides of the hole. People “connected across groups are more familiar with alternative ways of thinking and behaving, which gives them more options to select from and synthesize” (Burt 2004: 349–350). Those people may enjoy having “good ideas,” that is, ideas considered to be valuable.

<sup>2</sup> In his later work, N. Lin (Lin and Ao 2008) pointed to the informal workings of social capital, or its “invisible hand,” meaning that social networks may be beneficial without any particular action on the side of the actor (e.g., when social networks provide routine but unsolicited job information).

The non-redundant sources of information are usually available if a person's social network encompasses "weak ties" (Granovetter 1973). This is because the strength of a tie between the ego and alter increases the probability that both will have the same pool of acquaintances and friends and thus compose one social circle. By contrast, weak ties are more likely to be social "bridges," that is, to span remote nodes of social networks, facilitating information and influence flows. As Granovetter (1973: 1971) expressed it, "those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive."

The conceptions of "structural holes" and "weak ties" may both be helpful in refining the structural mechanism underlying the aforementioned link between networks and art participation. Now we can speculate that there is a heterogeneity of network, weak ties, and brokerage across structural holes that make beholders amenable to new ideas in art and more prone to develop eclectic, omnivorous tastes. If this is the case, the opposite contention will indicate that more dense, cohesive, and homogenous networks are more conducive to narrowing the range of art preferences or enforcing a more conservative, restricted taste.

### Hypotheses

To summarize, guided by research and theoretical considerations, I posit a connection between personal network characteristics and specific forms of art appreciation, in addition to the more familiar set of status-related background indicators. The latter, as evidenced by research dating back to the pioneering studies of Bourdieu and Darbel (1991), are still expected to matter in marking taste boundaries and lifestyles. According to Bourdieu's model (1993), appreciation of and familiarity with the high arts is a trained capacity, with access to this training unequally distributed among social classes (DiMaggio and Useem 1978). There are members of the dominant class (especially of its cultural fraction) who received an extensive socialization in legitimate culture (through family upbringing and in school), who have attained mastery of the symbolic language of the arts, and who are able to assimilate even the most challenging examples of the avant-garde and to view art as formalistic, aesthetic, and without function. As was noted by Bourdieu (1993: 217), "one of the reasons why the less educated beholders in our societies are so strongly inclined to demand a realistic representation is that, being devoid of specific categories of perception, they cannot apply any other code to works of scholarly culture than that which enables them to apprehend as meaningful objects of their everyday environment." This leads us to the following hypotheses:

- H1. An interest in the visual arts is a function of socio-economic status (especially education and cultural capital acquired from family).
- H2. An appreciation of modern styles of art (i.e., abstract, non-figurative art, in opposition to traditional art) is positively correlated with social-stratification variables, such as education and family cultural capital.

Traditional art, being the most comprehensible for almost everyone, does not serve the function of an emblem of social distinction and thus is not expected to be embedded in the stratification order.



The context that frames the engagement with contemporary or traditional art forms also entails personal connections and concomitant social orientations. As was elaborated above, network characteristics such as size, heterogeneity, structural holes, density, and strength of ties are of critical relevance to the art-consumption domain. It may be hypothesized, for example, that larger and more diversified networks, which are rich in structural holes, can increase the odds of exposure to less accessible high-culture tastes and activities, inculcate a preference for complex cultural material, or indicate a desire for a cosmopolitan identity. Therefore, they should be associated with attitudes toward art and preferences (Kane 2004). DiMaggio (1996: 177) suggested that an art museum may hold a special appeal to persons interested in exploring cultures different from their own. Thus, it stands to reason that the open, knowledgeable orientation that characterizes persons who are the most initiated in art (e.g., adherents of more “difficult” art), when trained on the social horizon, would lead to an accumulation of social capital in the form of new relationships and access to new social networks. Conversely, the more dense the social network and the more homogenous the community, the less important will be a command of more “arcane” culture and the greater the probability of a person’s having traditional tastes. Network heterogeneity may also be a source (or an effect) of versatile taste, that is, a taste for different styles of art, as Erickson’s study (1996) showed. She noted that the more diverse the set of contacts a person has, the more diverse will be the culture the person encounters and acquires. The reverse is also true: in order to maintain diverse networks, persons must have a wide variety of cultural tastes (Lizardo 2006, 2013). This does not invalidate Bourdieu’s (1984) core idea that tastes may serve as a means of preserving elite boundaries. As we know, what allows entrance into the social circles of cultural elites is the ability to sustain detailed conversations that are predicated upon the ability to enjoy (decode) difficult cultural objects. Therefore, we may expect that a general interest in art and a particular liking for works considered more difficult to grasp should be a function of having connections to members of higher social strata (Lizardo 2016). On this account, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H3. Network heterogeneity is positively related to interest in art and preference for more recent styles of art (rather than for traditional works), after adjusting for stratification factors.
- H4. Network heterogeneity is positively related to a wide range of art preferences.
- H4. Network density is conducive to holding traditional preferences but negatively associated with preferences for modern art.
- H5. Social networks containing more outward-looking ties (e.g., non-family ties) are associated with more engagement with the visual arts and appreciation of its modern forms.
- H6. People having connections with persons of higher social ranks should show greater interest in art and prefer more niche art (e.g., modern art).

### **Data and Variables**

In order to answer the research questions, I have used data from the survey “Social Structure, Networks, and Consumption Tastes and Practices,” a unique research project integrat-

ing diverse measures of social networks/capital with extensive indicators of cultural participation and consumption.<sup>3</sup> In computer-assisted face-to-face interviews, 1,010 randomly selected respondents (the residents of one large city—Wrocław, Poland) aged between 18 and 75 years were questioned in detail about their cultural tastes, activities, and knowledge in a broad range of domains (including highbrow culture, e.g., art, as well as lowbrow or popular culture such as film, cuisine, music, traveling, or leisure). That a city or region may be a highly relevant research area for lifestyle differentiation has been amply demonstrated in previous research (cf. [Priour et al. 2008](#); [Berghman and van Eijck 2009](#); [Kajdanek and Pluta 2017](#)).

Following the guidelines provided by Holt (1997: 117) for measuring cultural taste patterns at a level of specificity that allows for inferences regarding embodied tastes, I used information on ten styles of art, which were presented to the respondents on the computer screen (the so-called photo-elicitation technique). I decided to make use of a specific form of cultural participation, namely, visual art preferences (proxied mainly by paintings<sup>4</sup>), not only because in the collective imagination they represent a prototypical example of what art is, but also because they give us greater insight into cultural orientations and the social location of the interviewees. So far, scholars interested in cultural preferences have often had to make do with rather general and non-selective questions on the attendance frequencies of, for instance, museums, galleries, theaters, and so forth, which conceal much diversity in symbolic meanings. While informative at a general level, such indicators are not sufficiently sophisticated to reveal deeper layers of engagement. As was argued by R.A. Peterson (2005: 265), an advantage of respondents' self-reporting of their preferences over attendance frequencies is that the former better tap into the way the respondents use art in shaping identity and symbolically announcing their place in the world.

The respondents were made acquainted with a set of paintings/graphics with no information about the artists or labels identifying the styles or time of creation. As more than one work of art was depicted on the plates, respondents were asked to judge the general style on the plate rather than the individual works. For each set of works, the respondents were asked how well they liked the type of art depicted. The answers were given on a seven-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much" (the intermediate answering categories were numbered, not labelled). The styles were shown to the respondents in random order to omit the anchoring effect. The following plates were presented: impressionism/post-impressionism; late Renaissance/Baroque; Polish historical painting/academism; abstract art; abstract expressionism; nineteenth-century landscapes; surrealism/fantastic realism; primitives; street-art; pop-art (cf. [Berghman and van Eijck 2009](#); [van Eijck 2012](#)) (see [Appendix](#) for a list of all the art works included). The respondents' answers were then used as input for a principal component analysis. The use of visual stimuli to gauge taste preferences seems to be a more suitable approach than using merely descriptive labels of styles, as these latter (in opposition to music, for example) are poorly recognized by the average survey participant and amenable to diverse interpretations. Visual stimuli can evoke quite

<sup>3</sup> The research was supported by grant no. 2016/21/D/HS6/02424 from the National Science Center (Poland).

<sup>4</sup> Although engagements with painting were privileged, I am fully mindful of a broader visual culture in the contemporary world, where the importance of images in photography, film, advertisement, and electronic media has great significance. Future research should take account of a more general field of visual culture.

intuitive responses among people who are not experts in a given domain. As Berghman and van Eijck wrote (2009: 354), “if you want to know how people appreciate specific styles or works of art, you can just show them pictures and have them evaluate those on the spot.” The selection of styles of art and works was dictated both by theoretical intuition and previous studies showing, e.g., the distinctive nature of modern/abstract art or impressionism (Silva 2006; van Eijck 2012). The underlying idea was to include a range of types of art of varying degrees of “legitimacy” and styles (from “street” to “academic” art; from figurative to non-figurative art). At the same time, I shunned the most iconic works (e.g., “Mona Lisa”), whose presence on the plate could have influenced the reception and judgement of a given artistic style. Aside from tastes, general interest in the visual arts was a subject of research. It was evaluated using a five-point scale from 1—“not at all interested” to 5—“very interested.”<sup>5</sup>

The key question I intend to answer in this article is how patterns of visual art preferences are inserted in personal networks and social capital. In the methodological literature we find at least three survey methods for measuring the latter, namely, the name generator/interpreter, the position generator, and the resource generator (Marsden 2012; Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2005; Sadowski 2012). All assume to a greater or lesser extent that social capital is the multiplicative outcome of the extensity of the social network (size, diversity) and resources embedded within it. In this study, social networks are measured using, among other things, the position generator (PG) (Lin and Erickson 2008), which remains one of the most reliable network tools and whose usefulness in the consumption domain has been corroborated in past studies (Erickson 1996; Cebula 2018). This tool captures the connections that people have to other people at different levels of the occupational hierarchy, on the assumption that knowing more different occupations and having access to higher status jobs generates more social capital (Lin and Erickson 2008). In the survey, the respondents were shown a list of 14 occupations (containing both low- and high-status jobs)<sup>6</sup> and then asked to indicate for each occupation whether or not they had “family members, friends/close acquaintances, or distant acquaintances with that occupation.” Responses to this generator are usually combined into summary measures of the composition and range of the respondent’s egocentric network. For the purpose of the study, I calculated, first, the total number of higher status positions, and second, the number of medium and lower status positions accessed.<sup>7</sup> This allowed us to assess what kind of social contacts matter as far as art consumption is concerned.

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<sup>5</sup> Although, as has been argued, our measurement of tastes make progress in comparison to previous studies that were based on attendance indicators, I agree that the comprehensive picture of art consumption should include information about preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and the possession of art objects (e.g., in homes). It is owing to a lack of space in the questionnaire that not all possible aspects of the art were incorporated. However, some of them (e.g., knowledge and attitudes) were elaborated elsewhere (Cebula 2015; 2018).

<sup>6</sup> The list included the following: lawyer, doctor, university lecturer, teacher, IT specialist, businessman/owner (other than respondent’s employer), local politician, journalist, mechanic, book-keeper/accountant, artist/actor/musician, counter clerk, nurse, construction worker or finisher.

<sup>7</sup> Two groups of contacts were assessed on the basis of principal component analysis and hierarchical cluster analysis, which generated similar results, corresponding roughly with the standard occupational rank developed by Domański, Sawiński and Słomczyński (2009). Higher status positions included the following: lawyer, doctor, scientist, local politician, journalist, artist/actor/musician. The remainder from the list was counted in the category “medium and lower status positions”.

To provide a more comprehensive picture of network correlates of art participation, certain additional network measures were added. One of these, network diversity (heterogeneity), followed K. Growiec's (2015) operationalization of bridging social capital, that is, capital involving people with different social characteristics than ego. As was assumed, diverse social networks give an opportunity to communicate with members of various social groups and thus to gain more diversified resources and abilities. Therefore, respondents were asked whether they had friends or acquaintances who were dissimilar to them in terms of age, political stances, lifestyle, material status, sexual orientation, etc. The positive answers were subsequently summarized in one index of social network diversity.<sup>8</sup> The second variable is network density, measured by a single question (cf., *Słomczyński and Tomescu-Dubrow 2007*). The respondents provided information about how many of their friends and close acquaintances knew each other, using the following categories: "all know each other—they make up one bunch of friends"; "most of them know each other"; "about half of them know each other"; "only a few of them know each other"; "nobody or almost nobody knows each other—my friends make up distinct social circles." The greater density was attributed to having more contacts interconnected.

As an interest in art and specific art preferences may be affected by exposure to cultural incentives and themes, I set out to assess the extent to which a personal social network comprises people who can influence the ego's lifestyle and cultural choices. Following the idea of a resource generator (RG) proposed by M. Van Der Gaag and T. A. B. Snijders (2005), the respondents were asked whether they knew anyone (a) who is a source of information about how they can spend their free time attractively (what to see or where to go), (b) thanks to whom they can try new things (e.g., dishes, sports, hobbies), (c) with whom they can spend free time outside the home, (d) who is a source of information about new technologies (telephones, computers), (e) who is a source of information about cultural matters (e.g., cinema, exhibitions, books, plays), (f) whose lifestyle inspires them, or (g) who is a source of job-related information. All items were used to construct one scale, tapping into the availability of the specific "cultural" resources embedded in someone's network.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, I included two separate measures on the frequency with which the respondents spent their free time with their household/family members rather than friends and acquaintances (outside the family). These contacts were measured on an ordinal scale, which ranged from 1—"never" to 5—"very often." As was shown by previous research (*Cebula 2015*), social contacts may be a good proxy for social capital (in terms of resources) and network extensity. By the same token, I figured in associational social capital. To that end, a single question on the number of associations (such as a political party, a professional

<sup>8</sup> The wording of the question was, "Among your friends and acquaintances, are there people (a) who are older or younger than you by at least 15 years?, (b) who hold different political views than you?, (c) who have a different material status than you?, (d) who prefer different kinds of music, literature, and entertainment than you?, (e) who lead a different lifestyle than you?, (f) who do not speak Polish?, (g) who are outside of your group of friends from the neighborhood or school?, (h) who have a different sexual orientation than you?" The following answer options were available: "No", "Yes, 1–2 persons", "Yes, a few persons," and "Yes, many persons." All positive answer categories were coded 1 and then counted to create one index of network variety (ranging from 0 to 8).

<sup>9</sup> Every item was measured on a three-point scale, where 1 meant "I do not know anyone," 2—"I know someone among my friends or family," and 3—"I know someone both from among friends and family." The final index has been calculated on the basis of the principal component analysis.

society, a labor union, a parent-teacher association, etc.) to which a respondent claimed membership was asked.<sup>10</sup>

The statistical analysis reported in the next section is based on techniques of binary logistic and linear multiple regressions, with measures of interest in art and visual art preferences as dependent variables and a range of socio-demographic<sup>11</sup> and network indicators as independent variables.

## Results

As Bourdieu's (1993) model would lead one to expect, many "cultural needs" (including aesthetic ones) appear only in those who can satisfy them, that is, those who have received the means to appreciate them from their family environment and education. Cultural need thus does not precede cultural competence but is rather affected by or develops concurrently with it. Assuming at the same time that this competence is not easily accessible and far from evenly distributed across society, we may anticipate that general interest in the visual arts is a function of socio-economic status (e.g. education and family cultural capital). By analyzing the data in [Table 1](#), we learn that this is in fact the case. The table depicts estimated binary logistic regression equations, in which interest in art is the explained variable, while background and network characteristics are the explanatory variables. The dependent variable has been dichotomized using a mean value as a split criterion. Thus, I try to predict who has a greater than average interest in art, compared to a reference category of those persons who are less interested or not at all interested in art.

Overall, the average interest in art was 2.79 (Median = 3; SD = 1.23) on a 5-point scale from 1—"not at all interested" to 5—"very interested." Of the total sample, 19.4 percent and 22.3 percent of respondents were, respectively, "not at all" and "rather not" interested in art, while 25.9 declared an average level of interest. A minority of people reported that they were interested in art: "in some degree"—25 percent and "very interested"—7.5 percent.

The estimates provided in [Table 1](#) allow for two important conclusions: the declared art bias depended first on the variable characterizing social status (especially on cultural capital), and second, on network patterns. People with a higher level of education and more educated parents (and also enjoying a better standard of living) are more likely to be interested in art than their counterparts in lower social strata (see Hypothesis 1). For instance, an increase of one unit of parental cultural capital multiplies the likelihood of being interested in art by 1.27. This confirms the idea that art consumption reflects and probably upholds social boundaries. Moreover, some properties of the social network are of relevance, as evidenced by Model II. As can be seen, the change of size of Nagelkerke  $R^2$  (which is interpreted as the proportion of variance of the dependent variable that is accounted for by the regression model) from 0.155 to 0.255 indicates that Model II better predicts category

<sup>10</sup> The scale ranged from 0—"no membership" to 4—"membership in at least four organizations."

<sup>11</sup> The socio-demographic variables were the following: age (in years), education (with 9 categories), family cultural capital (that is, a linear combination of the educations of the father and mother), social status (self-assessed on a 10-point scale from 1—"very poor" to 10—"very good"), economic standard of living (measured as a weighted index of the possession of eleven durable goods, such as a dishwasher, a smartphone worth over PLN 700, a laptop/notebook/tablet, a coffeemaker, a car, various sports equipment, etc.).

Table 1

**Predictors of interest in art (logistic regression odds ratios)**

| Variables (predictors)   | Model I  |                 | Model II |                 |
|--|----------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
|  | Wald     | Exp (B)         | Wald     | Exp (B)         |
| (Constant)   | 34.604   | <b>0.178***</b> | 24.051   | <b>0.081***</b> |
| Economic standard of living                                    | 33.996   | <b>1.188***</b> | 8.260    | <b>1.098**</b>  |
| Education  | 17.453   | <b>1.225***</b> | 8.804    | <b>1.163**</b>  |
| Family cultural capital  | 8.937    | <b>1.270**</b>  | 2.764    | 1.153           |
| Number of high status contacts (PG)                            |          |                 | 22.498   | <b>1.241***</b> |
| Number of medium and lower status contacts (PG)                |          |                 | 3.759    | 0.921           |
| Frequency of spending free time with nonhome family members    |          |                 | 0.356    | 0.947           |
| Frequency of spending free time with friends and acquaintances |          |                 | 9.899    | <b>1.316**</b>  |
| Network diversity  |          |                 | 15.776   | <b>1.151***</b> |
| Access to resources influencing lifestyle (RG)                 |          |                 | 9.089    | <b>1.268**</b>  |
| Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>                                   | 0.115    |                 | 0.189    |                 |
| Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>                                      | 0.155    |                 | 0.255    |                 |
| -2 Log likelihood  | 1221.479 |                 | 1135.256 |                 |

\* p &lt; 0.05

\*\* p &lt; 0.01

\*\*\* p &lt; 0.001

membership. Four out of six network variables show a significant effect on interest in art, especially the frequency of spending time with friends and acquaintances (Exp (B) = 1.316;  $p < 0.01$ ), followed by access to resources influencing lifestyle (Exp (B) = 1.268;  $p < 0.01$ ). In other words, the more people socialize with their friends (but not with relatives outside of their home) and the more they are exposed to cultural incentives and advice, the more they are inclined toward art generally, net of stratification variables (see H5). The same is true regarding network heterogeneity. People having connections with a diversified group of other people are more likely to declare an interest in art, as expected in Hypothesis 3. Art involvement is also more pronounced among those having a greater number of ties to people occupying higher social positions (see H6). This confirms the presumption that command of some cultural forms (e.g., high art) contributes to enhancing class cohesion as a topic of conversation and shared symbolic system. This is all the more true when we consider the lack of significant association between interest in art and the number of social ties to persons in medium and lower status positions. Taste for the arts is not a valuable currency in this social environment.

An empirical question that has not previously been addressed is the relationship between specific visual art preferences and socio-demographic and network variables. So far, empirical studies have demonstrated that responses to visual art are determined by respondents' cultural capital, habitus, and social class (Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991; Silva 2006), but a growing body of research lends credence to the contention that social capital also matters. To test this assumption, I will assess the effects of networks indicators on different tastes in art, using data on preferences for ten different styles of art. Previous research (Berghman and van Eijck 2009; van Eijck 2012) demonstrated that these styles can be reduced to two dimensions using principal component analysis. Accordingly, I distinguished two major art orientations. Five styles of more recent date (abstract

art, pop-art, surrealism/fantastic realism, abstract expressionism, and street art) showed high loadings on component 1; the remainder (late Renaissance/Baroque, Polish historical painting/academism, impressionism/post-impressionism, and nineteenth-century landscapes) constituted a second component.<sup>12</sup> Because primitives held an intermediate position, that is, they belonged to both components, they were excluded from further analysis. Scores on these two factors were then used as dependent variables. Note that the structure of styles of art bears a resemblance to the taste patterns identified by P. Bourdieu (1991) as an opposition between modern/abstract/nonfigurative art (which is appreciated by members of higher social strata) and more traditional, realistic works, which appeal to the dominated social classes. For Bourdieu, taste is developed in relation to the conditions of existence of individuals, that is, their place in *l'espace social*.

Table 2 reports the results of two series of OLS regression models of appreciation for both aesthetic orientations. I start with Model I, incorporating only the control variables (age, social status, education, economic conditions, family cultural capital, and interest in art); then I introduce Model II with additional (network-related) predictors, to assess their independent contribution to the total variance explained. *Prima facie*, tastes for different styles of art remain entrenched in socio-demographic characteristics, but the pattern of association differs between them. Age proves to be the strongest predictor of art appreciation; it increases the level of preference for traditional art and decreases the predilection for modern styles.<sup>13</sup> Younger respondents are thus more inclined to like abstract/non-figurative and contemporary art and older ones to like traditional art. Because of the cross-sectional nature of the data, it is not possible to disentangle whether this is a cohort or an age effect (Newman et al. 2013). A possible explanation for the finding is that particular cohorts may have been socialized differently. For example, moves toward multiculturalism, globalization, the expansion of popular culture, and fun may preferentially influence people who were born or grew up in the post-communist period in comparison to their parents. Some scholars link a shift in art preferences with a more general evolution of what defines cultural capital. It is argued that traditional, elevated, “highbrow” culture is losing ground to the more commercialized, playful, and stylized culture familiar to younger generations (Silva 2008; Hanquinet, Roose and Savage 2014). Lastly, in line with the idea that taste is an expression of what, or whom, one does not want to be, eschewing traditional art might rest on a distinction strategy for young people. “The moderns” are looking for art that is, in their view, original or different and certainly not old-fashioned or simply boring (Berghman and van Eijck 2009: 361).

Explanatory variables, such as education, family cultural capital, social status, and general interest in art, are more strongly related to the appreciation for modern art ( $R^2 = 0.310$ ) than to enthusiasm for traditional art ( $R^2 = 0.118$ ), a corollary of which is that the former carries a certain level of cultural distinction. Modern art reveals more about the status and “character” of its audience, as indicated by the positive effect of cultural capital/educa-

<sup>12</sup> The principal component analysis with varimax rotation was conducted. Eigenvalues were 2.749 and 2.335 respectively; the cumulative proportion of explained variance = 56.49.

<sup>13</sup> The term “modern,” used to describe this cluster, refers to a broad spectrum of styles of art that have developed since the late nineteenth century. It is not fully precise as some of them (e.g., street art) are counted as a part of contemporary art.

Table 2

**Predictors of preference for traditional art, modern art, and variety of preferences  
(standardized OLS regression coefficients)**

| Variables (predictors)   | Traditional art  |  | Modern art       |   | Variety of preferences |   |
|--|------------------|--|------------------|---|------------------------|---|
|  | Model I          | Model II                                   | Model I          | Model II                                  | Model I                | Model II                                  |
| (Constant)   | —***             | —***                                       | —***             | —***                                      | —                      | —***                                      |
| Age (in years)   | <b>0.312***</b>  | <b>0.298***</b>                            | <b>-0.295***</b> | <b>-0.260***</b>                          | <b>-0.084*</b>         | -0.049                                    |
| Subjective social status                                       | <b>0.152***</b>  | <b>0.188***</b>                            | <b>0.162***</b>  | <b>0.141***</b>                           | <b>0.199***</b>        | <b>0.192***</b>                           |
| Economic standard of living (weighted)                         | <b>-0.237***</b> | <b>-0.147***</b>                           | -0.054           | <b>-0.099**</b>                           | <b>-0.146***</b>       | <b>-0.145***</b>                          |
| Education  | 0.036            | 0.027                                      | <b>0.102**</b>   | <b>0.095**</b>                            | <b>0.077*</b>          | 0.071                                     |
| Family cultural capital  | 0.044            | 0.031                                      | <b>0.082*</b>    | 0.066                                     | <b>0.127**</b>         | <b>0.110**</b>                            |
| Interest in art  | 0.058            | <b>0.112**</b>                             | <b>0.250***</b>  | <b>0.205***</b>                           | <b>0.239***</b>        | <b>0.218***</b>                           |
| Number of high status contacts (PG)                            |                  | <b>-0.140**</b>                            |                  | 0.073                                     |                        | -0.026                                    |
| Number of medium and lower status contacts (PG)                |                  | -0.018                                     |                  | <b>-0.077*</b>                            |                        | <b>-0.095*</b>                            |
| Frequency of spending free time with home family members       |                  | <b>0.103**</b>                             |                  | 0.035                                     |                        | <b>0.082**</b>                            |
| Frequency of spending free time with friends and acquaintances |                  | -0.025                                     |                  | <b>0.118***</b>                           |                        | <b>0.110***</b>                           |
| Network diversity  |                  | -0.030                                     |                  | <b>0.124***</b>                           |                        | <b>0.143***</b>                           |
| Associational membership                                       |                  | <b>-0.119**</b>                            |                  | <b>0.083**</b>                            |                        | 0.038                                     |
| Network density  |                  | <b>0.077*</b>                              |                  | 0.044                                     |                        | 0.043                                     |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>  | 0.118            | 0.189                                      | 0.310            | 0.346                                     | 0.182                  | 0.212                                     |
| F—change (comparing to previous model)                         | —                | $\Delta F(7.899) = 12.280;$<br>$p < 0.001$ | —                | $\Delta F(7.899) = 8.144;$<br>$p < 0.001$ |                        | $\Delta F(7.898) = 5.917;$<br>$p < 0.001$ |

\* p &lt; 0.05

\*\* p &lt; 0.01

\*\*\* p &lt; 0.001

tion (beta = 0.102; p < 0.01), social status (beta = 0.162; p < 0.001), and, to a lesser degree, parental cultural capital (beta = 0.082; p < 0.05).<sup>14</sup> These findings conform to our expectations (see H2). The only exception is the negative sign of the variable for economic standard (in Model II).

Adding network variables moderately increases the proportion of explained variance in both models. The picture that emerges from the data is that network characteristics have a different impact on appreciation of modern and traditional art. People who are more enthusiastic about the former spend more of their free time with their friends and acquaintances (but not with their family and household members), while the reverse is true for the latter (cf. H5). In addition, those enjoying modern art have connections with more diversified alters (in terms of age, economic status, cultural preferences in music, literature, or pastimes, sexual orientation, national origin, etc.), while this relationship is not significant for those opting for older kinds of art (H3). A possible explanation for these findings could have to do with the increased odds of exposure to less accessible culture, specific dispositions acquired through communication with diverse people, or a desire for a cosmopolitan

<sup>14</sup> The effects of these variables is partially mediated by interest in art.



identity (Kane 2004). It is worth noting that the network diversity items most associated with a preference for modern art were the following: connection with someone who has a different sexual orientation, or with someone who does not speak Polish, or someone who is older or younger than the respondent by more than 15 years. This may suggest that the relation under study is likely to occur since both cultural tastes and social networking orientations are part of one cosmopolitan habitus. Those developing and sustaining more open and outward-looking ties are also more willing to appreciate complex and multi-layered art. By contrast, residing in more inward-looking networks and networks of higher density could impede the acquisition of some dispositions and aid more conservative preferences, as indicated by a positive (although modest) correlation between network density and appreciation of older forms of art ( $\beta = 0.077$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) (cf. H4).<sup>15</sup> The same applies to associational membership. Respondents who declared their membership in a greater number of organizations scored higher on the scale of modern taste ( $\beta = 0.083$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) but lower on the scale of appreciation of traditional art ( $\beta = -0.119$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Participation in voluntary associations (especially those composed of different people) is regarded as epitomizing so-called bridging social capital, a concept introduced by R.D. Putnam (2000) to describe networks encompassing people across diverse social cleavages and thus giving them access to external assets and information. In accordance with Tocqueville, membership in a voluntary association is considered a key source for the growth of trust between strangers and tolerance of differences between groups. According to our hypothesis, it may impinge upon attitudes toward and preferences for visual art and culture in general.

That said, not all social connections work the same way. As can be seen, the number of relations with people occupying higher social positions is inversely related to appreciation for older forms of art ( $\beta = -0.140$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), cognately as the number of social ties with persons in medium and lower status positions lowers affinity for modern artworks ( $\beta = -0.077$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The results only partially concur with expectations (H6), as no significant relation between taste for modern art and contacts with persons in higher social positions can be ascertained.<sup>16</sup>

The last analysis will pertain to the effect of network heterogeneity on the variety of art preferences.<sup>17</sup> For this purpose, a special compositional index of variety<sup>18</sup> was constructed and then used as an explained variable in the regression model containing the same set of independent measures as previously (see Table 2). The conclusion to be drawn from the table is that independently of socio-demographic variables, the pursuit of variety (that is, preferring both types of art styles) is influenced to a significant degree by network diversity and that this relationship is even greater in terms of the beta coefficient than for the scale of modern art ( $\beta = 0.143$ ;  $p < 0.001$  and  $0.124$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , respectively). As has been argued, having diversified tastes may be a “strategy” for extending vocabularies or repertoires in different genres, in order to be able to communicate with different audiences. The reverse

<sup>15</sup> Hypothesis 4 is confirmed only partially, as the relationship between network density and modern tastes is not significant.

<sup>16</sup> This relationship becomes significant if we remove the variable of interest in art from the equation.

<sup>17</sup> I use the term “variety” rather than “omnivorousness” as the latter connotes vertical boundary crossing (i.e., combining cultural items that hold different positions along the “highbrow—lowbrow” axis).

<sup>18</sup> Based on older and more modern items, extracted from the principal component analysis, I calculated how many pairs of each were found in a respondent’s taste pattern.

is also probable: exposure to diverse connections may result in acquiring by transmission a more heterogeneous cultural repertoire. The statistical fact that I wish to focus upon is also that the amount of variance explained by independent factors for the appreciation of modern art is significantly higher than for the index of variety, which suggests that the former bears more social and symbolic significance. In other words, social distinction is claimed rather through specific tastes (for “niche” art) than through likings for many styles of art.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Over the past twenty years there has been a remarkable revival of interest in the nature of cultural participation. Forty years after Bourdieu conducted the fieldwork for his book *Distinction*, (1984), numerous studies (e.g., Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Silva 2006, 2008) have shown how cultural differences remain entrenched in social divisions. Yet, although such results are welcome, they run the risk of masking other forms of diversity among cultural participants. In this article, I have reported findings that support the case for social networks (that is, a set of relations, associated meanings, and expectations that connect actors) as a context that frames engagement with visual art. In this regard, the present study is inscribed in a more sweeping tendency in the sociology of art perception and consumption (and the sociology of culture at large) to seek other than merely class or status antecedents of cultural participation (DiMaggio 1996; van Eijck 2012; Hanquinet 2013a, 2013b). Building on recent advances at the intersection of the sociology of culture and network theory (Lizardo 2006; Puetz 2015), as well as data from a specifically designed survey on personal networks and visual art preferences in Polish society, I have shown that the ways in which people are connected to each other, and the resources they obtain from these connections, are associated with their preferences and interests. More specifically, interest in art is shown to be a function of networks that have greater heterogeneity, are more outward-looking (friends-oriented), are rich in ties with higher status persons, and transmit cultural incentives and recommendations (even after controlling for traditional social determinants, such as education or economic capital). Similarly, adherents of different aesthetic styles (modern vs. older kinds of art) were embedded in networks of distinct kinds. Appreciation for the former was positively related to networks marked by some openness, as evidenced by the frequency of spending time with friends and acquaintances, attending voluntary associations, or having more diversified connections, while a liking for more traditional artworks corresponded to networks of greater constraint (family-oriented, informal, and dense). It is also worth noting that the status of contacts mattered, as enthusiasts for older forms of art had fewer ties with people from the higher social class and enthusiasts of “the moderns” had fewer ties with occupants of lower social ranks. According to the literature on networks (Lin 2001), searching for and obtaining new resources (e.g., of a kind useful in instrumental actions), usually requires transcending the inner layer of close relations and developing networks that involve bridges, structural holes, and weaker ties (Granovetter 1973; Burt 1992). Perhaps a larger than average interest in art and a preference for its more “demanding” forms is an example of resources of this kind and is thus closely related with an open network.

The empirical evidence, owing to its cross-sectional character, does not directly distinguish between theoretical accounts of the significance of the main relationship. According to a point made earlier, there is no plausible reason to believe that art preferences cause network formation and differentiation (although it may be true of more general taste orientations). It is more probable that specific pursuits are the result of network configurations or characteristics (as expected regarding network heterogeneity) (Kane 2004) or the relationship is a matter of affinity—the possibility that art engagement and tastes are embedded together in one habitus or identity (e.g., a cosmopolitan one). An argument for the first interpretation is that interest in art (and to some degree preference for more recent forms) was correlated with an exposure to higher status contacts and contacts providing cultural stimuli. On the other hand, the effect of network heterogeneity supports the idea of cosmopolitanism, understood both in the sense of being able to fit anywhere and as a positive liberal commitment to tolerance (Warde, Martens and Olsen 1999: 123). An openness to new values in contemporary art when translated into the social domain may yield more contacts with people who differ from us in many respects. This issue should be addressed empirically in further research. The focus should be on the attitudinal correlates of appreciation for different kinds of art, to reveal whether people who are more attracted to modern works are also more approving of multiculturalism or liberalism (cf. DiMaggio 1996).

Although the picture that emerges from the empirical data is that social networks are rather independent of (or additional to) class- or status-related variables in explaining art appreciation, we cannot entirely exclude that both social networks and the stratification variables used are just different aspects of more general background variables (or to put it another way, that network variables pick up some portion of cultural or economic capital that is not captured by formal education or standard of living, proxied by household equipment). What we need thus is to trace the antecedents of network participation (i.e., what kinds of social variables are responsible for individual participation in specific different forms of networks) and to check whether these are the same as those affecting culture consumption.<sup>19</sup>

This paper adds evidence to the debate on social stratification by shedding light on distinction patterns in the visual arts. Age, social status, and level of education remain the most important determinants of appreciation for the visual arts. As far as age is concerned, we cannot tell from our data if an age effect or a cohort effect is indicated. The latter seems to make more sense, as age reflects the growing importance of images and the aestheticization of reality, the rise of a new “screen” culture, and also the emergence of transgressive and new popular cultural forms and of entertainment values dating back to the sixties. At the same time, cultural consumption continues to reflect social inequalities and to uphold social boundaries, as implied by the explanatory power of background variables. The more pronounced socio-economic exclusivity of modern art enthusiasts allows us to infer that there is something symbolically significant about a taste for more contemporary and avant-garde art. In other words, cultural distinction and refinement are claimed rather through “niche”

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<sup>19</sup> This is akin to the question of whether social capital (as well as cultural capital) is in the last instance merely an emanation of more fundamental economic capital. But such an interpretation seems to contradict Bourdieu, who distanced himself from economic reductionism, underlining instead the multidimensional nature of the social space (Bourdieu 1985).

tastes than through a breadth of art preferences or a liking for traditional art. Nevertheless, we cannot exclude the possibility that the preferences manifested in regard to kinds of art (used here as a proxy for cultural tastes) conceal some portion of cultural differentiation, as the same objects of culture may be appropriated in symbolically divergent ways (e.g., by aesthetic disposition or by applying non-specific codes of everyday life), as was hinted by Bourdieu (1984, 1993) and identified empirically by S. Daenekindt and H. Roose (2017). Although our measurement strategy is an advance in comparison to past research, the artworks that represented a given style of art were diverse, and thus similar evaluations may have hidden different meanings attached to these styles. To address these issues we need to go beyond the survey data.<sup>20</sup>

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## Appendix

The list of art works shown to respondents during the interviews:

1. Impressionism/postimpressionism:
  - Claude Monet: Impression, Sunrise (1872)
  - Józef Pankiewicz: Targ na kwiaty przed kościołem św. Magdaleny w Paryżu [Flower market outside the Madeleine Church] (1890)
  - Vincent van Gogh: The Langlois bridge at Arles with women washing (1888)
2. Late-renaissance/Baroque:
  - Peter Paul Rubens: The union of earth and water (1618)
  - Peter Paul Rubens: Samson and Delilah (1609/1610)
  - Caravaggio: Supper at Emmaus (1601)
3. Polish historical painting/academism:
  - Jan Matejko: Batory pod Pskowem [Stephen Báthory at Pskov] (1872)
  - Henryk Siemiradzki: Pochodnie Nerona [Nero's Torches] (1876)
4. Abstract art:
  - Piet Mondrian: Composition no. 3, with red, blue, yellow, and black (1929)
  - Kazimir Malevich: Suprematist composition (1916)
  - Mark Rothko: Red, orange, tan and purple (1949)
5. Abstract expressionism:
  - Jackson Pollock: Number 8 (1949)
  - Clyfford Still: PH-118 (1947)
  - Adolph Gottlieb: Beautiful rug (ca. 1950)
6. 19<sup>th</sup> century landscapes:
  - Józef Chełmoński: Kuropatwy na śniegu [Partridges in the snow] (1891)
  - Józef Chełmoński: Świt. Królestwo ptaków [Dawn. The kingdom of birds] (1906)
7. Surrealism/fantastic realism:
  - Aram Vardazaryan: Caravan Dali
  - René Margitte: Golconda (1953)
  - Wojciech Siudmak: Secret armada
8. Primitives:
  - Nikifor Krynicki: Dymiące kominy
  - Karol Kostur: Rynek nowotarski
  - Marc Chagall: The betrothed and Eiffel tower (1913)
9. Street-art:
  - Banksy: Girl with red balloon (There is always hope)
  - Banksy: Maid in London
  - Anonymous mural
10. Pop-art:
  - Andy Warhol: Marilyn Monroe (60.)
  - Roy Lichtenstein: Whaam! (1963)
  - Peter Blake: Sources of Pop Art V