

*A theory of art with instrumental value to the state,  
and applied case studies from the New Deal art production in the  
USA*

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*Abstract*

This research starts with the assumption that the cultural economics research program has not adequately addressed a self-interested state using art production to grow the state's discretionary power (e.g., see Weber 2017, *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*). Although cultural economists have focused on art as a public good deserving state-funding and other values beyond exchange in the research program, instrumental value in use by the state can be better articulated in the literature. This paper contributes towards this research by modeling how a self-interested state might behave (e.g., Wagner 2009, *Fiscal Sociology and the Theory of Public Finance*), and then how the state might use art towards creating preferences for a larger role for the state in society. After presenting this model of "art-statism" we give several examples from the archives illustrating how the Public Art Project under the New Deal in the United States uses art instrumentally. It is hoped that this research might motivate other cultural economists to explore the nexus between the state and art's instrumental value in socially-formed preference creation.

## I. Methodological Approach to the Paper

It has been argued that the main methodological difference between orthodox and heterodox cultural economists and economists who don't practice cultural economics is that art contains value beyond that of exchange. Throsby provides a list of these 'cultural values' in *Economics and Culture* (2001) and Weber (2017) uses the work of the philosopher of science Imre Lakatos to argue that those practicing cultural economics share an ideology that art contains value beyond that of other economic goods and that this is a 'hard core' belief which is irrefutable in the research program. This irrefutable ideology can be shown by the concept of "psychic income" to help explain the differences between art and other investment,

Until recently, it would be true to say that economists only studied art markets because they provided ample data and the pork belly markets would have served just as well for the application of the latest fancy econometric techniques of time series analysis. But that glib accusation will not do for the recent literature on art markets, which has finally come so far to suggest some direct and indirect methods of measuring *psychic income* of art collections so as to explain the gap between the financial returns on art investment and those of other financial assets (Frey and Eichenberger 1995)" (Blaug 2001, 129, *emphasis added*).

Klamer (2016), in a recent work devoted to value, also finds that cultural goods contain value beyond (market) exchange.

David Throsby, a fellow cultural economist, is pursuing a value-based approach as well. In a discussion of cultural goods, like paintings and theatre performances, he lists an often-cited set of six values that pertain to such goods: aesthetic value, spiritual value, symbolic value, social value, symbolic value and authenticity. Each of these values point at a particular quality of the artwork (Throsby, 2001). This list demonstrates the multi-faceted character of an artwork. But when we are interested in the "realization of values" we need more (55).

*Cultural economics research program is missing instrumental value to the state*

Weber (2017) in a literature review exploring the concepts of value used by art economists finds that what is missing from the canon is that art can be used as instrumental value by a self-interested state seeking to grow its discretionary power. Perhaps one reason that mainstream art economics has missed that state-funded cultural production can be used instrumentally by the state is that mainstream economics assumes that preferences are given, and does not explore what creates these preferences in the first place, in our case for this paper, preferences for the state's role in our lives.<sup>1</sup>

So in this regard this paper may be an exercise in political economy<sup>2</sup> rather than economics. Frey finds that the heterodox approach of political economy has been under emphasized in the art economics research program.

There is no sense in restricting the analysis to purely economic aspects of culture. Obviously, the state plays a most important role in directly (via subsidies) and indirectly (via regulations such as tax laws) supporting the arts. At the same time government may cripple arts, not only in dictatorships but also in democracies. In both cases the decisions made by the state are based on political (and bureaucratic) considerations. Political aspects are relevant in the arts beyond the state. Many more actors are involved in influencing the arts, and are in turn influenced by them (see e.g. Hutter 1986, 1987). Hence, there is no doubt for me that a political economy of the arts is needed (Frey 2003, 8-9).

We address Frey's insight directly in this paper. The concept of "art-statism," where we use political economy to assign self-interest to the state's art production (in certain, but not all, cases), can endogenize and make dynamic the state's role in society. In doing so we also explore art's potential use in preference creation.

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<sup>1</sup> "With the motto *De Gustibus non est disputandum* (taste is not a subject for discussion), standard economists usually presume preferences to be given and do not elaborate on or explore them." (Klamer 2016, 44).

<sup>2</sup> "In our view, political economy is the methodology of economics applied to the analysis of political behavior and institutions" (Weingast and Wittman 2006b, 3).

### *Max Weber's theory of the state*

We use the work of Max Weber whose writings underpin our notion of the democratic state to help us develop the concept of art-statism in the next section of the paper. In *Politics as a Vocation* [1919] we learn of the state's monopoly on violence, that in a democracy the state must maintain a sense of legitimacy, and that those active in politics seek power and prestige.

Nowadays, in contrast, we must say that the state is the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory – and this idea of “territory” is an essential defining feature (33, *emphasis in original*).<sup>3</sup>

[T]he state represents a relationship in which people *rule over* other people. This relationship is based on the legitimate use of force (that is to say force that is perceived as legitimate)” (34, *emphasis in original*).

Whoever is active in politics strives for power, either power as a means in the service of other goals, whether idealistic or selfish, or power “for its own sake,” in other words so as to enjoy the feeling of prestige that it confers (33-34).

### *An Application of fiscal sociology*

Next, we visit the state-theoretical approach used by Wagner (2007) to see how he builds upon Max Weber to develop a sociology of the state. Wagner uses an ideal-type dichotomy to describe two forms of government, the “organization” and the “order,” which I attempt to illustrate in Exhibit 1 below. We find that state organizations have goals and the discretionary power to realize these goals, with the pole of an absolute monarchy on the left-hand side of the continuum. In the ideal-type an absolute monarchy does not have to negotiate its actions with the citizenry through catallactics. Juxtaposed with an organization we have the order occupying the right half of the continuum, with the most democratic order being one with a unanimity rule, or the *liberum veto*. An order is “an institutionally-

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<sup>3</sup> For example, there are more than 1,000 US military troops in 16 countries, <http://www.businessinsider.com/us-military-personnel-deployments-by-country-2017-3>.

mediated order of human interaction” requiring consent and legitimacy due to electoral politics (Wagner 2007, 7).

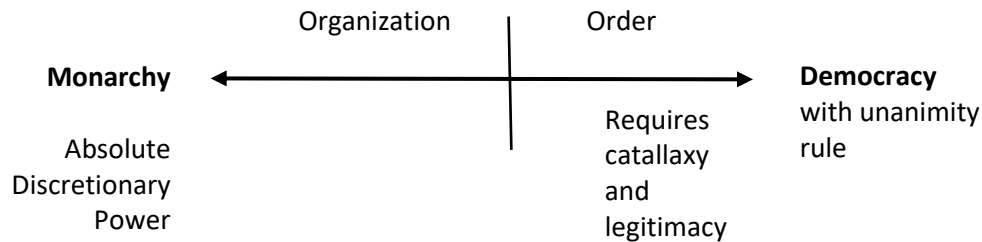


Exhibit 1: Dichotomy and Continuum between the “Organization” and “Order” Forms of Government. Diagram by author, adapted from ideas found in Wagner (2007).

### *Jasay’s theory of the state*

We now introduce the work of Anthony de Jasay (1998) to assign agency to a self-interested state.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that our theory of the state follows Jasay and deviates from Wagner. For Wagner the state in a democracy requires catallaxy (is an *order*) where the state balances the competing claims of both public and private enterprises. For Jasay the state pursues its own interests (is an *organization*). However, for both writers the democratic state, following Max Weber, requires legitimacy.

Jasay begins analysis by stating that there are two first principle ways to evaluate the state. The first is to ascribe the state as being an “inanimate tool, a machine” without ends, as only individuals have aspirational ends. In this view for Jasay the state is a tool manipulated

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<sup>4</sup> The discussion here on Jasay summarizes *The State* (1998, 266-273), “Towards a Theory of the State” subchapter. For ease of narrative we omit specific page references to the quotes used, which are all found in the noted subchapter.

by others for their own ends. The second way to view the state, and that preferred by Jasay, is to “merge the state and the people who run it, and consider the state as a live institution which behaves as if it has a will of its own and a single hierarchy of ends...” Jasay chooses this latter analytical lens “because it looks the most fertile in plausible deductive consequences.” This is not to propose that the state and its representatives do not engage in what we might conceive as benevolence, only that it is not scientific to hypothesize that this is the state’s only motive.<sup>5</sup>

The state seeks power of will, discretionary power. “Instead of saying, tautologically, that the rational state pursues its interests and maximizes its ends, whatever they are, I propose to adopt, as a criterion of rationality, that it seeks to maximize its discretionary power.” The state pursues power beyond reproduction of its power as the state realizes it must gain in power in order to continue its privilege, it’s monopoly on legal coercion, on legal violence. However in doing so the state must “implant in the public consciousness a certain sense of the state’s legitimacy,” note that this follows the findings of Weber [1919] shown above. Jasay also believes that the state may seek increased power for *existential* reasons alone, “It would be rational for a state pursuing its own ends to escape from the treadmill where its power is used up in its own reproduction.”

Revisiting Exhibit 1 we find that a self-interested state can be seen as attempting to move leftward along the organization – order continuum, balancing the seeking of an increase in power with the necessity of maintaining legitimacy. Jasay finds then that as the state transitions from a process-oriented government representing the people in a *polis* (Wagner’s “order”), it metamorphizes into something else (Wagner’s “organization”), something self-interested, which

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<sup>5</sup> Further Jasay writes that even if the state was a benevolent dictator it could not pursue the general will and “the interests of its subjects unless they were homogenous.” The reason for this is because the state’s “adversarial relationship to them [its subjects, *sic*] is inherent in its having to take one side or another between conflicting interests,” for example consumers (most everyone) versus domestic producers (certain people) in any industrial policy action preventing free-trade over the long-term.

might be of alarm to some citizens (or at the least to Jasay). It is seen by Jasay that a state which has increased its power is not degenerative for the state itself, but is negative only over whom the state rules.

Making itself *less dependent on subject's consent*, and *making it harder for rivals to compete*, would amount to improving the environment instead of adjusting to it.... I would not accept that, like Plato's Republic on its way from democracy to despotism, the state 'degenerates' in the process. If it has improved its ability to fulfill its ends, it has not degenerated, though it may well have become less apt to serve the ends of the observer, who would then have every reason to be alarmed by the change (Jasay 1998, 272-273, *emphasis in original*).

## II. Art-Statism

Oz Frankel (2006) uses the term "print statism" to describe the US and British government publications of the 19th century. These publications were used to help define, enlarge and legitimize the state in society, helping to build the nascent nation-state, these states being what Benedict Anderson (1991) calls "imagined communities." "Beyond declared goals and the façade of 'information', legislatures and governments sought to represent their citizens and the national (or, sometimes, imperial) sphere in ways that exceeded conventional modes of political representation, namely, electoral politics" (Frankel 2006, 1). We note that Frankel defines this statism as something which attempts to 'exceed' electoral politics, a message congruent with art-statism as discussed in this paper.

We also find a form of statism in Liz Cohen's *Making a New Deal* (2006), something described as "worker statism." Cohen claims that the New Deal social programs replaced the voluntary mutualism which preceded the Roosevelt Administration.<sup>6</sup> "Workers' faith in the state grew out of old as well as new expectations. On the one hand, they wanted government to take care of them in much the same paternalistic way as they previously had hoped their welfare capitalist employers and their ethnic communities would do" (Cohen 2006,

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<sup>6</sup> See Beito 2000 for a comprehensive study of the various forms of decentralized mutual aid in the USA prior to crowding-out by the federal welfare-state.

283).<sup>7</sup> The promises of the New Deal formed within workers (the median voter) a consciousness of expectations. “Apparently, American workers were dreaming neither of a dictatorship of the proletariat nor a world where everyone was a successful capitalist. Rather, they wanted the government to police capitalism so that workers really got that ‘new deal’ they deserved” (Ibid., 286).

Welch (2013, 42) believes “building and sustaining a sense of national identity is an important goal for most states” and describes the birth and development of the state (in the West) as an enlightenment project beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century “The nation has been defined as an ‘imagined political community’ ...this sense of imagined community differs from an actual community, because it is not based on everyday, face-to-face interaction among its members” (Ibid.). We find as well, following Max Weber [1919], that the state needs to build towards its monopoly on coercion.

Creating the sense of nationhood, of belonging, is imperative for any state in order to justify political and economic policies to its citizens – especially when it comes to the collecting of taxes and other unpalatable activities (Welch 2013, 42).<sup>8</sup>

### *National culture*

“National culture” is similar to what we are calling art-statism, only the difference is that for art-statism we need evidence of an intent to enlarge the discretionary power of the state (the order of the public square in Exhibit 4) in the state-funded cultural production, whereas national culture can be such things as placing the U.S. Constitution in the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC (and

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<sup>7</sup> Further, “This dependence on a paternalistic state is most clearly seen in the way workers viewed President Roosevelt. For many workers, FDR was the federal government” (Cohen 2006, 283).

<sup>8</sup> Anderson writes that these relatively new nation-states “imagine themselves antique” (1991, xiv). “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias” (Ibid., 204).



making entrance free)<sup>9</sup> and placing the Magna Carta in the British Library. National culture production does not necessarily require art-statism<sup>10</sup>. But art-statism is always nationalism<sup>11</sup>, where state power is salutary. The relationship between national culture and art-statism is shown in Exhibit 2.

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<sup>9</sup> Anti-Federalists note that the revolutionary war was won under the pre-constitution Articles of Confederation and believe that the constitution was a statist power grab by Hamiltonians. Therefore, whether housing the U.S. Constitution in the museum is art-statism is perhaps available to subjective judgment and interpretation.

<sup>10</sup> Below is the consecration of Janis Joplin as national culture as appropriated by the U.S. Postal Service (art-statism with the intended audience the baby-boomers in the United States seeking the “good old days”?). The Post Office lost almost \$6 billion in 2016 ([https://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2016/pr16\\_092.htm](https://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2016/pr16_092.htm)) and has around \$100 billion in liabilities (US GAO 2013).



<sup>11</sup> Klammer (2016) finds nationalism and patriotism as values in his “societal domain of value,” but does not explore the use of culture by the state to increase its discretionary power, something he might describe as a “functional value” to the state.

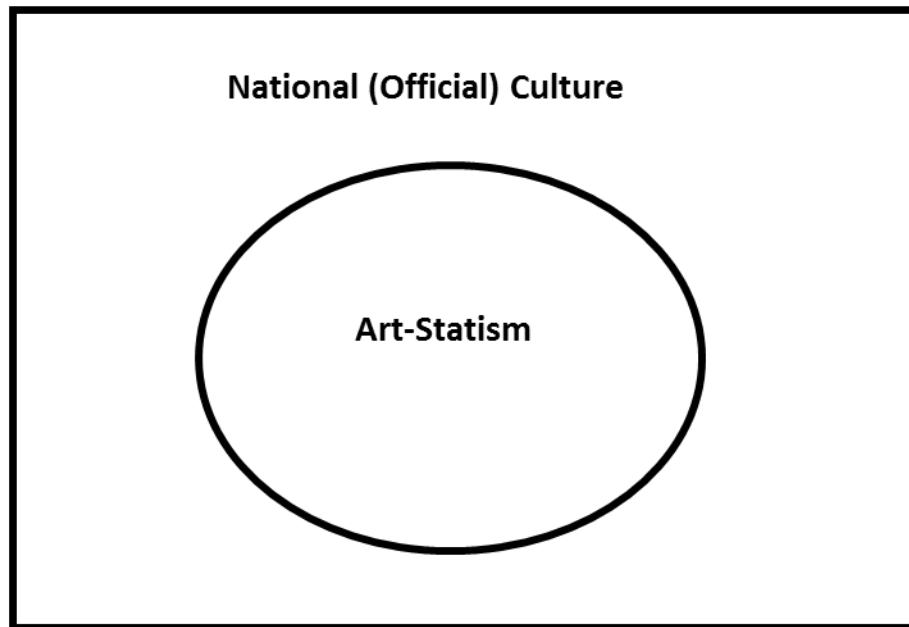


Exhibit 2: Venn Diagram on National Culture and Art Statism. Author's diagram based on discussion in the text.

*Historical "progress" and the state*

In addition for building the necessary theoretical foundations to describe art-statism (and applied to the New Deal art in the next section), I adapt the dialectical approach formed from the Fichte Triads as described in for example *Rules for Radicals* (1971) by Saul Alinsky. At a given moment the state-art is used to create *fear* (the thesis) as manifested in a social problem, the state then proposes/promotes its state solution to the problem (the anti-thesis, which offers *hope*), with the succeeding moment in time being an increase in the legitimate power of the state as it creates or enlarges monopolistic government programs to address the problem (the

synthesis, which results in *progress*).<sup>12</sup> This dialectic is shown in Exhibit 3.

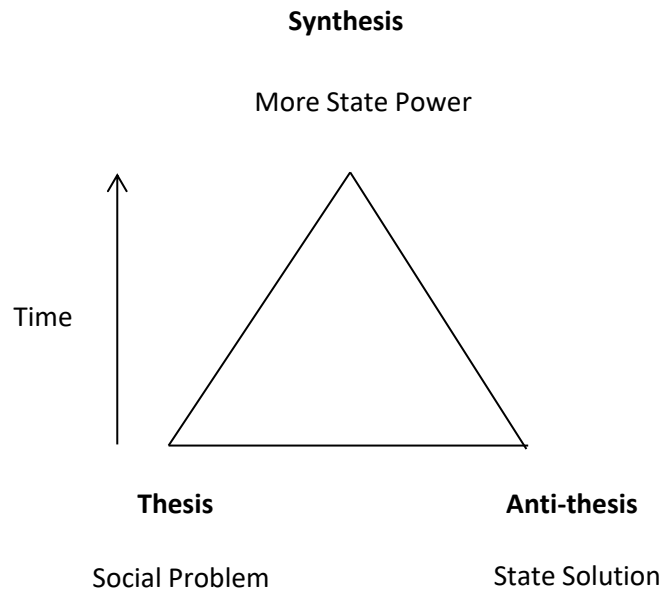


Exhibit 3: Fichte Triangle Illustrating Historical “Progress” and State Power. Author’s diagram.

### *Aesthetic precognition and experiential cognition*

Wagner (2007) uses a binary structure of mind theory to discuss the relationship between the individual and society. Man’s nature,<sup>13</sup> according to Wagner, is a duality between self-interest and

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<sup>12</sup> “It is quite obvious that in reality this compliance [with a legitimate state] is the product of interests of the most varied kinds, but chiefly hope and fear” (Weber [1919] 2004, 34).

<sup>13</sup> Some may prefer the terminology “man’s instincts” as opposed to “man’s nature.”

socialization (or between man and society). “I work with a bi-directional relationship between mind and society. From one direction, the interaction among minds generates and transforms societal formations; from the other direction, those formations channel and shape both the ends people choose to pursue and the means they employ in doing so” (Wagner 2007, 21). Wagner’s fiscal sociology differs from mainstream economics in that Wagner can account for taste activation towards preference creation whereas mainstream economics assumes preferences are given.<sup>14</sup> I have tried to capture Wagner’s political economy in Exhibit 4.

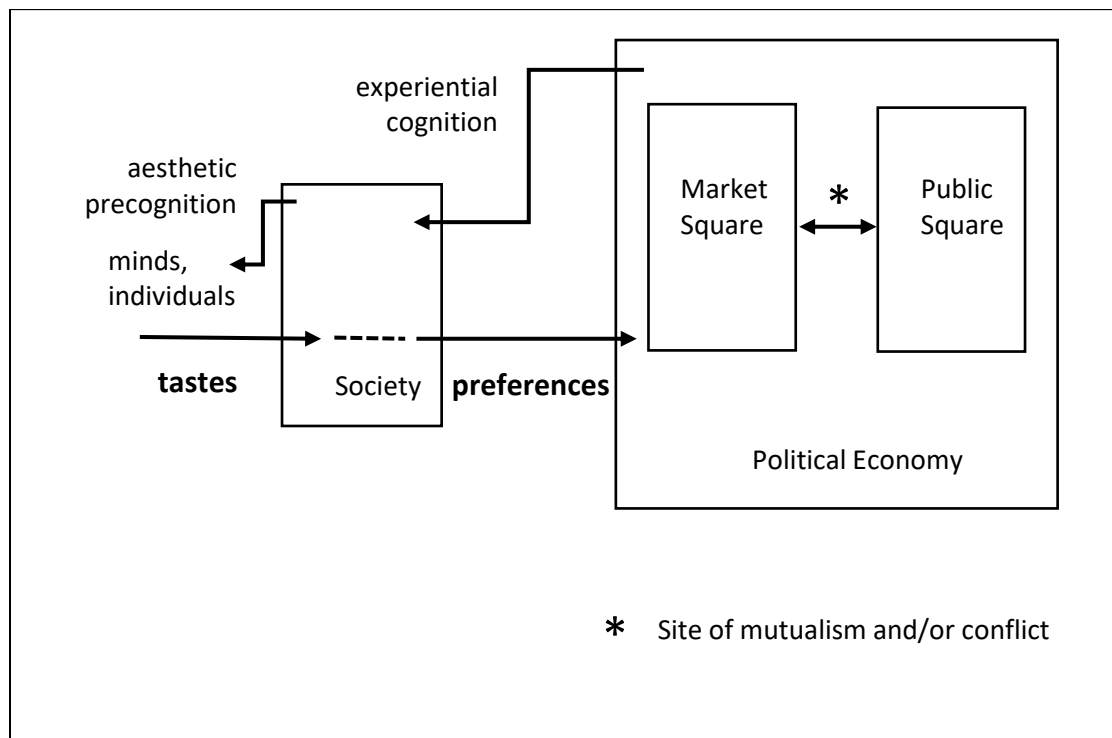


Exhibit 4: Precognitive Taste Activation and Preference Revelation in Exchange. Diagram by author based on ideas in Wagner (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Wagner’s fiscal sociology may be considered heterodox cultural economics as it helps to define preference creation. Note that Wagner uses sociology rather than economics as an entry-point into his political economy.

Individuals are born with pre-rational “tastes” (see further Hume 1757 and Kant 1790) and have tastes activated in society through aesthetic precognition feedback loops (these can be trend following, peer-pressure, emotional propaganda, conspicuous consumption, etc.).<sup>15</sup> These tastes then become “preferences” as reinforced in society which are then manifested in market exchange (the market square) and/or in collective action (the public square). The interaction between the market and public squares can be mutualism (forbearance) and/or conflict (solipsistic behavior). (A self-interested state would of course seek to tip the scale towards forbearance in collective action.)

Preferences are brought to bear rationally in the social or political economy *ex ante* and then these preferences are rationally adjusted through *ex post* experiential cognition in relations with others in society. The rational adjustment of preferences through action (or inaction) removes cognitive dissonance between “an experienced past and a conjectured future” (Wagner 2007, 81) whereas precognitive tastes may be activated not out of (conscious) dissonance. The feedback loops found in Exhibit 4 are also consistent with Jasay on a robust social theory with feedback mechanisms.

Our theory would not be a social theory if it had no sting in its tail, no indirect, roundabout secondary effects and no “feedback loops.” Thus, it is entirely likely that once the state has made people observe the cult of Bach, *and* they have in due course taught themselves to like it, they will “identify” better with the state which gave them their tastes [preferences, *sic*]. Likewise, the splendor of the presidential palace, the achievement of national greatness and “being first on the moon” may in the end implant in the public consciousness a certain sense of the state’s legitimacy, a perhaps growing willingness to obey it regardless of hope of gain and fear of loss. Hence, they may serve as a cunning and slow-acting substitute for buying consent (Jasay 1989, 270, *emphasis in original*).

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<sup>15</sup> One example of “society” here might be the museum as a site of consecration for a work of art (Bourdieu [1979] 1984). The gatekeepers and experts who determine the value of art in the political economy (museum curators in this instance), results in a work being placed in a museum. A new visitor enters the museum with tastes, experiencing the art then turns these tastes into preferences, which are again revealed in political economy in a new condition of exchange.

### III. Examples from the New Deal Archives

In this section we analyze, using the model of art-statism developed above, examples from archives related to the state-funded art production during the New Deal and the build-up of the welfare state in the United States. We also find an example of art-statism during the United States involvement in World War Two.

#### *Social security and public works*

The first example of the New Deal art as art-statism is from the Ben Shahn archives at Harvard University. There is a letter dated November 7, 1940 from Shahn to Mr. Edward B. Rowan at the Federal Works Agency, Washington, DC where we can read the Fichte Triad in Shahn's mural proposal for the Social Security Building.<sup>16</sup> The social problems as outlined in "the three panels of the east wall" are "Child Labor," "Unemployment" and "Old Age." The state solutions to the social problems are found on the "west wall" where we find "Public Works" and "Social Security" both of which are major contemporary New Deal programs.

We can read this mural as being in service to the state in that the mural uses aesthetics and emotion to create preferences in the viewer of this public art (voter, citizen, government program recipient, taxpayer, bureaucrat). Preferences for an increase in state power as manifested with the New Deal programs are now part of the aesthetic as opposed to rational realm, an increase in state power is legitimized *a priori*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This case is from documents which are in possession of the Stephen Lee Taller Ben Shahn Archive, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. They were sent to the present author by Robert Sennett, Harvard University Library Liaison for the archive, email dtd. May 2, 2013. Used with permission.

<sup>17</sup> Shahn's "The Meaning of Social Security" is in the building which now houses the Voice of America (VOA) in Washington, DC. I have included a photograph of a portion of the "east wall" from <http://livingnewdeal.berkeley.edu/projects/department-of-health-and-human-services-murals-and-frescoes-washington-dc/>. This public art appeals to the fear emotion and Social Realism speaks in a clear voice directly to the popular ear.



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By contrast working class people, who expect every image to fulfill a function, if only that of a sign, refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgements. Thus the photograph of a dead soldier provokes judgments which, whether positive or negative, are always responses to the reality of the thing being presented or to the functions the representations could serve [the alleviation of poverty, social security, child labor, author], the horror of war or the denunciation of the horrors of war the photographer [painter of a New Deal mural or designer of a New Deal poster, author] is supposed to produce simply by showing that horror. (Bourdieu 1984, 41).

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Arts. Only copy

Jersey Homesteads  
Hightstown, New Jersey  
November 7, 1940

Mr. Edward B. Rowan  
Section of Fine Arts  
Federal Works Agency  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Ed:

Following is a detailed description of the content of the Social Security Building sketches, with titles for the separate panels.

Your choice of the quotation from President Roosevelt's message to Congress has stood me in good stead. Since I have an embarrassment of riches in social security material - both in feeling and in data - I have taken the President's words around which to build the mural. They afford a much-needed limitation as well as a motif:-

"Among our objectives, I place the security of the men, women and children of the Nation first.

"This security for the individual and for the family concerns itself primarily with three factors. People want decent homes to live in; they want to locate them where they can engage in productive work; and they want some safeguard against misfortunes which cannot be wholly eliminated from this man-made world of ours."

(West Wall)

Thus, I have used the long unobstructed wall on the west side of the building to interpret the meaning of social security, and to show something of its accomplishments. On this wall I have developed the following themes:

"Work"      "The Family"      "Social Security"

As a plastic means of emphasizing these themes I have placed each group over a doorway in large scale, projecting them somewhat forward from the rest of the mural.

The Family

Using the Family as a central theme, over the middle door, I have placed over the left door, the theme of Work, over the right that of Security. Immediately surrounding the

Work

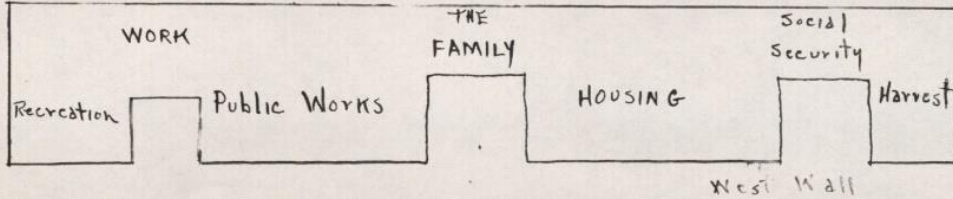
REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



1  
Security  
ousing  
Public Works  
Recreation  
The Harvest

Family are, on the right side, the building of homes, on the left, a suggestion of tremendous public works, furnishing employment and benefiting all of society. At the extreme left of the panel are seen youths of a slum area engaged in healthy sport in handball courts. At the extreme right is seen the Harvest--threshing and fruit-gathering, obvious symbols of security, suggesting also security as it applies to the farm family.

Thus, for the west wall, we have:



(East Wall)

Since the panels of the east wall are recessed, and because the evils of insecurity are being ameliorated, I have used that wall to portray the insecurity of men, women and children.

Unemployment

Unemployment being the greatest cause of insecurity, I have devoted to it the large central panel. I have tried to give the feeling of endless waiting, men standing and waiting, men sitting and waiting, the man and boy going wearily into the long empty perspective of a railroad track. Against a background of the typical stark, unlovely company house, I have placed in close proximity waiting men and discarded machines.

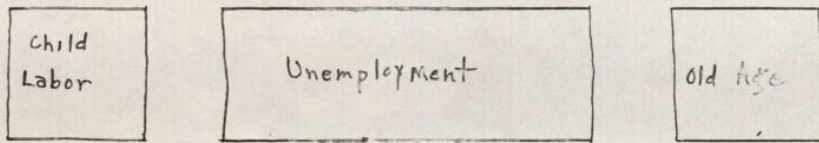
Child Labor

The panel to the left depicts the insecurities of childhood. The little girl of the mills opens doors to show us breaker boys working in a mine. The crippled boy issuing from the mine symbolizes the perils of child labor. To the right, a homeless boy is seen sleeping in the street; another child leans from a tenement window.

Old Age

The panel to the right shows the insecurity of dependents--the aged and infirm woman, the helpless mother with her small child.

Thus, the three panels of the east wall:-



East Wall

If this is in any way inadequate it can either be elaborated or condensed. I think of the work in pictorial terms, and therefore I may well have neglected some aspect of it in presenting it verbally.

We might discuss it Monday or Tuesday.

Very sincerely yours,

Ben Shahn

*Resettlement and unionization*

This case shows art production being adjusted when it may have been out of the bounds of legitimacy for a publicly-funded art project in a

democracy, and under the Roosevelt New Deal electoral coalition.<sup>18</sup> Shahn was involved in the Jersey Homesteads Resettlement Project in Roosevelt, New Jersey, both as an artist and a resident. We find correspondence related to the mural Shahn was to create for the Community Center.

The first document is an “Inter-Office Communication” of the Resettlement Administration (part of the Farm Security Agency) from Alfred Kastner of the Construction Division to Mr. Adrian J. Dornbush, Director of the Special Skills Division, dated March 2, 1936. The memo states that Shahn is an employee of the Construction Division and introduces Mr. Dornbush to the mural project. The next document is a letter dated January 13, 1938 from Dornbush to Shahn requesting a list of “all the items as you are planning to use them in full text, including the names of firms printed on the buildings, the text of the sign behind the central labor leader, etc.”

The next is a letter from Dornbush to Shahn dated January 17, 1938 requesting specific changes to the mural.<sup>19</sup> It is this letter which concerns us here. The first intervention into Shahn’s work is to request that he change “Re-elect Roosevelt” to “OUR GALLANT LEADER – FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.” It is hard to tell why exactly this change is requested. It could be that it is seen that a blatant electoral message pushes too far beyond what could be considered a legitimate message for public art. In a democracy created with a constitution allegedly limiting the state, where the government is supposed to serve the people, “a gallant leader” may imply an increase in discretionary power for the state.<sup>20</sup> A (charismatic) leader, of course, needs (acquiescent) followers.

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<sup>18</sup> This case is from the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Ben Shahn papers, Box 25, Folder 41. The records are available, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/ben-shahn-papers-6935>.

<sup>19</sup> I was not able to find in the archives any correspondence relating to the Shahn Homesteads mural between March 2, 1936 and January 12, 1938.

<sup>20</sup> Note “Gallant Leader” could also be military jingoism. This *prior* to Germany’s invasion of Czechoslovakia. David Welch states that one of the most iconic and long-lasting Nazi posters was a photograph of Adolph Hitler, underneath which

The second and third changes requested relate to the labor movement in the United States. The mural depicts a time-line of unionization starting with the Mechanics Union in 1827. The “pro-labor” NIRA and NLRB<sup>21</sup> legislation passed in 1935 encouraged unionization, which doubled as a percentage of the workforce between 1935 and 1940, and city-based labor unions were part of the Roosevelt electoral coalition. Shahn is requested to show the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) as parallel contemporary movements, referred to in the document as the “AFofL and CIO question.” In fact in the mid-1930s there was a transition in the labor movement with the skilled-labor AFL in descent and the more inclusive CIO in the ascendancy under the leadership of John L. Lewis. Lewis split-off from the AFL and joined and built-up the CIO by rapidly organizing the previously excluded “unskilled.”

The AFL was known to be racist and to exclude minorities from membership (Targ 2010 and Zinn 2005, 328).<sup>22</sup> However the New Deal electoral coalition also included both black workers in the northern cities, and, white southerners, so the depiction of the relationship between the two unions must have been seen as sensitive to the Farm Security Administration in Washington, DC. So sensitive in fact that Shahn is requested in the third item of the Dornbush/Shahn letter to remove any similarities to the anti-racist Lewis from the mural. Also of note is that the radical Industrial Workers of the World,

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read “One People, One Nation, One Leader” (Welch 2013, 68-69). It is known that President Roosevelt wanted the United States to enter World War Two to aid the U.K. Roosevelt pursued with his war efforts by conducting a “campaign” against the “isolationists” (Olson 2013).

<sup>21</sup> The National Labor Relations Act, or Wagner Act, removed redress for harm caused by strike-actions from the civil court system to administrative law.

<sup>22</sup> Hapke (2008) calls the AFL “male and pale” and shows how the “pro-labor” Social Realism art movement began to depict black as well as white workers while the CIO was ascendant from the mid-1930s onward.

founded in 1905, is excluded from the history of unionization, given that many of Roosevelt's supporters were "southern conservatives."<sup>23</sup>

This finding differs from that of Higgs (2013) who writes that the second, social, New Deal was seen as so successful that Roosevelt continued to radicalize himself. The missing IWW "Wobblies" from the labor-movement timeline shows that there must have been a limit to this radicalization in order for the administration to maintain legitimacy with the Roosevelt electoral coalition.

The last document related to the resettlement project used here to evaluate art-statism is the letter dated February 21, 1938, Washington, DC, from Dornbush to Shahn. Dornbush states, "I think it is important that no firms presently operating in the needle trades industry be used." We find the first page of the March 10, 1935 Press Release related to the Jersey Homesteads. Note that this publicity is from the Division of Subsistence Homesteads (also part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture) and the project is to,

[A]ccommodate 200 needle trade workers and their families, the Jersey Homesteads project is outstanding by reason of the fact that it will be the first subsistence homestead community in which the major activities of the homesteaders will be conducted on a cooperative basis [2<sup>nd</sup> para].

It might be seen that the garment industry could be unsupportive of a federal government project which resettles 200 of its workers from the garment district in Manhattan into a back-to-the-land cooperative in New Jersey, essentially sending the message to the industry, and to a public viewing the public art, that subsistence living is better than working in privately-owned garment factories.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Roosevelt, careful not to offend southern white politicians whose political support he needed, did not push a [federal] bill against lynching" (Zinn 2005, 404).

<sup>24</sup> We include a photograph of the final mural, in the third panel on the right, in the upper left-hand corner, one can see the labor movement timeline and the depiction of the labor-leader. Available, [http://music.columbia.edu/roosevelt/pop\\_mural.html](http://music.columbia.edu/roosevelt/pop_mural.html). The website describes the mural,



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The three panels of this 12 x 45 foot fresco mural depict the history of Roosevelt [the Jersey Homesteads resettlement project], from the eastern European origins of its Jewish residents and arrival at Ellis Island to the planning of their cooperative community. As the mural dramatizes, theirs was the story of escape from dark tenements and sweatshops in the city to simple but light-filled homes, and a cooperative garment-factory, store, and farm in the country. Early supporters of the community, Albert Einstein and the artist Raphael Soyer, are depicted in the mural along with many of the original residents of the town.



INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION  
RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION

(REFER TO ONLY ONE SUBJECT IN EACH COMMUNICATION)

TO Mr. A. J. Dornbush  
Director  
Special Skills Division  
FROM Alfred Kastner  
Hightstown Project  
Construction Division  
SUBJECT Mural Picture

DATE MAR 2 1936

COPIES TO

16-4201

Today, Mr. Shahn of your Division called in connection with the proposed mural picture for Hightstown, New Jersey. The following points were discussed and established as preliminary procedure:

- (a) The picture shall be about 60' long and approximately 20' high, from a socket 7' high, thus the highest point of the picture will be 27' from the ground.
- (b) Mr. Shahn is to work out a script for the mural with a number of variations to same. The theme is to center about contemporary life to the Jewish emigrant, to touch on immigration and emigration, his assimilation into the country, industrialism and unionism, with contra-pointal adoption of programs elsewhere, and immigration to Palestine.
- (c) A committee be asked to cooperate on the discussion and interpretation and acceptance of the preliminary sketches. The following have been suggested for this committee:

Charney Vladeck, New York City  
Maier Shapiro, New York City  
Felix Adler, New York City  
Rabbi Dr. Feinschreiber, Philadelphia, Pa.

I am to check on these names with a committee of settlers when I meet them on Monday, March 9.

During the conversation, Mr. Louis I. Kahn, my assistant, was present and various possible types of painting were discussed. It seemed advantageous to this project that the services of Mr. Normark, who is considered a mature technician of Fresco painting, and now with the Special Skills Division, be drawn into the preliminaries of this work.

AK/dab

1619 Thirtieth Street, N.W.,  
Washington, D. C.,  
January 13, 1938

Dear Ben,

In line with our conversation on legends and other written material appearing in the mural, please let me have sometime within the next two weeks a listing of all the items as you are planning to use them in full text, including the names of firms printed on the buildings, the text of the sign behind the central labor figure, etc.

I am planning to drop Rex a line in the near future and will ask him to write the general legend covering the story of the entire mural. However, I suggest you rough out for me an indication of the line of thinking you had in mind in this connection and send it on with the others.

It is important that I have this in order to be able to cushion you against any further questionings on this score, and to clear this material for you directly with the Administrator.

Sincerely,

*Alison*



*story of minerals, groups  
also union story  
forces that brought about  
new deal.*



1619 Thirtieth Street, N.W.,  
Washington, D. C.,  
January 17, 1938

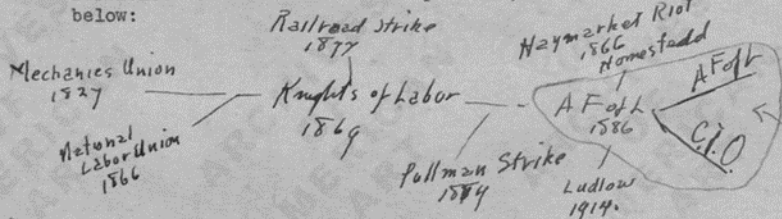
Mr. Ben Shahn,  
Jersey Homesteads,  
Hightstown, New Jersey.

Dear Ben:

Just a little personal note which may relieve you in regard to points on the mural. All is again quiet on the Administrative Front--and I'm sure you'll agree with me that the points of change on which we have worked out an understanding are fair enough. The situation is as follows:

Your mural is cleared up and down the line, provided that:

1. The legend "Re-elect Roosevelt" be changed to:  
"OUR GALLANT LEADER - FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT."
2. The graph of the history of unions on the blackboard, with reference to the AFofL and CIO question, be shown as below:



- \* 3. That the head of the central figure of the labor leader be modified so as not to be interpreted as a likeness of Lewis. (The eyebrows and the mane of hair were the points objected to.)
4. That all other printed material - legends, names, etc. - shown in the mural be submitted to the Administrator for approval.

*That this be a no portrait of any one man*

Sincerely yours,

*Adrian*

*The only point under question was the that related to the delineation of A F of L and Cio. This in the way that meets the approval of the Union office.*

*Note that no Lewis with arms found out from either CIO or A F of L*

1619 Thirtieth Street, N.W.,  
Washington, D. C.,  
February 21, 1933

Dear Ben,

I was very happy to learn from your letter of February 11 that you felt that my report on your mural covered the subject. It seemed to me that for the first time we had really been given a good opening to make a statement on it to the Administrator's Office, and it was not a hard job to do for the reason that everybody concerned was willing to take a calm and reasonable point of view, at the same time taking the viewpoint of the other side into consideration. Moreover, all of the points that had been raised with regard to the mural were rumors, easily swept away by a presentation of the facts.

I am submitting the contents of your letter with reference to the legends and printed matter to Mr. Perkins. You did not say whether any of the firms (A. E. Lefcourt, A. Beller, Davidow, Aronson Bros.) are still extant. I think it is important that no firms presently operating in the needle trades industry be used.

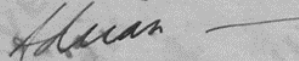
I have not been able to get in touch with Rex these last few days. His father is seriously ill and he has been in New York, but I will let you know developments. It would be find if we could make this trip together.

Please let me have the information on the firm names right away, since I have already sent in the information to the Administrator and shall be expecting a comeback on that in a day or two.

I am interested to know how Bernarda is getting along with her mural.

Best regards.

Sincerely,



Mr. Ben Shahn,  
Jersey Homesteads,  
Hightstown, N. J.

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Division of Subsistence Homesteads

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESS

FOR RELEASE IN SUNDAY MORNING PAPERS OF MARCH 10, 1935.

One of the most significant projects yet to be undertaken by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads entered its final stage of development today, when Secretary of the Interior Ickes approved the budget and progress schedule for Jersey Homesteads, near Hightstown, New Jersey.

Planned to accommodate 200 needle trade workers and their families, the Jersey Homesteads project is outstanding by reason of the fact that it will be the first subsistence homestead community in which the major activities of the homesteaders will be conducted on a cooperative basis.

Jersey Homesteads will be developed with an allotment of \$850,000 advanced by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads plus a down-payment of \$100,000, or \$500 per family, contributed by the homesteaders. Each family will purchase and own individually its home and a one acre homestead tract. The remainder of the land will be devoted to the various cooperative enterprises. Most important of the nonagricultural enterprises will be a garment factory, which will provide employment for the community's workers and give them the cash income required to meet the payments on their homesteads.

While open to any qualified applicant, in keeping with the Division's policy of making no discrimination as to race, creed, color, or political belief, the project was undertaken to help solve a definite economic problem affecting workers in the garment industry. Applicants for homesteads have, as a result, been almost 100 percent Jewish, and the project's sponsorship has come chiefly from leaders of the Jewish community in New York City. The plan for the project was

97164

### *Public Relations*

In this example we find that it is necessary to disseminate art which realizes instrumental value to the state, legitimately, in order to reach as many people as possible. There is a draft form-letter from Jacob Baker, the Assistant Administrator of the New Deal's Federal Art

Project (FAP), dated June 8, 1936 inviting the recipient to a “national show of paintings, water colors and designs for murals at the Philips Memorial Gallery” in Washington, DC. Then we find an updated version one day later, June 9, 1936, this time from the Director of the FAP, Holger Cahill. We can see the mark-ups on the June 8 letter which were carried-over to the edited letter. We see that the letter was changed to perhaps be less “authoritarian” (e.g., having more legitimacy) with the removal of subjective valuations on behalf of the sender to eliciting more of a ‘buy-in’, or more opportunity for choice, on behalf of the recipient.

In the edited version of the letter, “It is my hope...” in the first paragraph, and “I believe...” and “It seems to me...” in the second paragraph have been replaced with a more objective wording. We also see that the exhibition is one which everyone “should” see is replaced with “will want to” see. The New Deal is not being forced down anyone’s throat, this in order to maintain its legitimacy. That the letter of invitation is now from the Director, instead of the Deputy Director, also gives the *exhibition* more legitimacy.

We also find a letter dated September 9, 1936 from FAP State Director for Southern California, Nelson H. Partridge, Jr., to Harry Chandler, publisher of *The Los Angeles Times*. Partridge is thanking the *Times* for its support of the Federal Art Project, despite the fact that the Hearst Company “and other publications [are] opposed to the Administration.”<sup>25</sup> We find from this letter that the Federal Art Project understands that dissemination of its art-statism to the general public is necessary for the messages to come across.

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<sup>25</sup> Stuart Ewen writes that the New Deal’s antagonism to publishers, “the conventional commercial manufacturers of truth,” may have been a conscientious public relations strategy enabling the FDR administration to generate their “own communications channels” which “promoted and advanced an inclusive vision of America” using “a diversity of creative arts on behalf of New Deal programs.” “The range of these enterprises was enormous; together, they contributed to the way that people continue to envision the period of the Great Depression and the New Deal” (Ewen 1996, 263).

June 8th, 1936

Dear Mr. --

The Federal Art Project is opening a national show of paintings, water colors and designs for murals at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1600 Twenty-First Street, Northwest, on June 15th. The exhibition will continue until July 5th. ~~It is my~~ hope that you will find it possible to attend the private review of the exhibition on Monday, June 15th.

A group of about one hundred works has been chosen for the exhibition. This group presents a cross-section of what has been accomplished under the Federal Art Project, especially by the younger artists whose work is little known to the general public.

~~I believe~~ The work shows a great deal of vitality and vigor of expression and a wide range in the choice of subject matter. ~~It seems to me that it~~ is an exhibition which everyone interested in the white collar projects of the Works Program ~~should see.~~

Yours very sincerely,

Jacob Baker  
Assistant Administrator

I hope you can come in on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

WALKER-JOHNSON BUILDING  
1734 NEW YORK AVENUE NW.  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

HARRY L. HOPKINS  
ADMINISTRATOR

June 9, 1936

Dear Mr.

The Federal Art Project is opening a national show of paintings, water colors and designs for murals at the Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1600 Twenty-First Street, Northwest, on June 15th. The exhibition will continue through July 5th. We hope that you will find it possible to attend the private review of the exhibition on Monday, June 15th, from two to six P.M.

A group of about one hundred works has been chosen for the exhibition. This group presents a cross-section of what has been accomplished under the Federal Art Project, especially by the younger artists whose work is little known to the general public.

The work shows a great deal of vitality and vigor of expression and a wide range in the choice of subject matter. It is an exhibition which I believe everyone interested in the white collar projects of the Works Program will want to see. I hope you can come on June 15th.

Yours very sincerely,

Jacob Baker *Holger Cahill*  
Assistant Administrator *title*

*Approved*  
*JS*



( C O P Y )

FEDERAL ART PROJECT  
Los Angeles Museum  
Exposition Park  
Los Angeles, California.

September 9, 1936.

Mr. Harry Chandler, Publisher,  
The Los Angeles Times,  
Los Angeles,  
California

Dear Mr. Chandler:

On behalf of the Federal Art Project, I wish to express our sincere appreciation of the very fine manner in which the work of the Federal Art Project has been presented in the Los Angeles Times,--pictures and articles and news items.

We appreciate this the more because of the fact that your paper is not generally in accord with the program and policies of the New Deal.

Especially do we appreciate the fact that your paper has consistently given credit to the Federal Art Project for the work it has accomplished, instead of omitting mention of the Federal Art Project as is the custom with the Hearst papers and other publications opposed to the Administration.

We admire the honesty of your paper in this regard, and feel sure that such a policy can only increase the respect in which the Times is held in this community.

Very truly yours,

Nelson H. Partridge, Jr.  
State Director for Southern California.

P.S. I am sending copies of this to Mr. Holger Cahill, National Director of the Federal Art Project, and to Messrs. Arthur Millier and Joe Park of the editorial staff of the Times. This letter is not inspired by either Mr. Park or Mr. Millier, or anyone else.

## *War Finance*

This case is also from the Harvard University Shahn archives, and shows how the Roosevelt Administration wishes to use fear tactics to create preferences for young adults living at home to increase their financial contributions for the war effort. We find a January 27, 1944 letter to Shahn from Daniel Melcher, Acting Director of the Education Section, in the War Finance Division of the U.S. Treasury Department. Melcher is requesting Shahn's help in creating a poster which typifies, and extends, the art-statism as illustrated so far.

The poster under discussion is to entreaty those "boys and girls" who are living at home and working while attending high school to give more of their income to the purchase of war bonds than is expected of "the family man." Melcher believes that these dependents should be "investing" 90% of their income as opposed to the 10% that the family man is "touched for." The boys and girls "owe it" to their older friends now in military service "to back them to the limit."

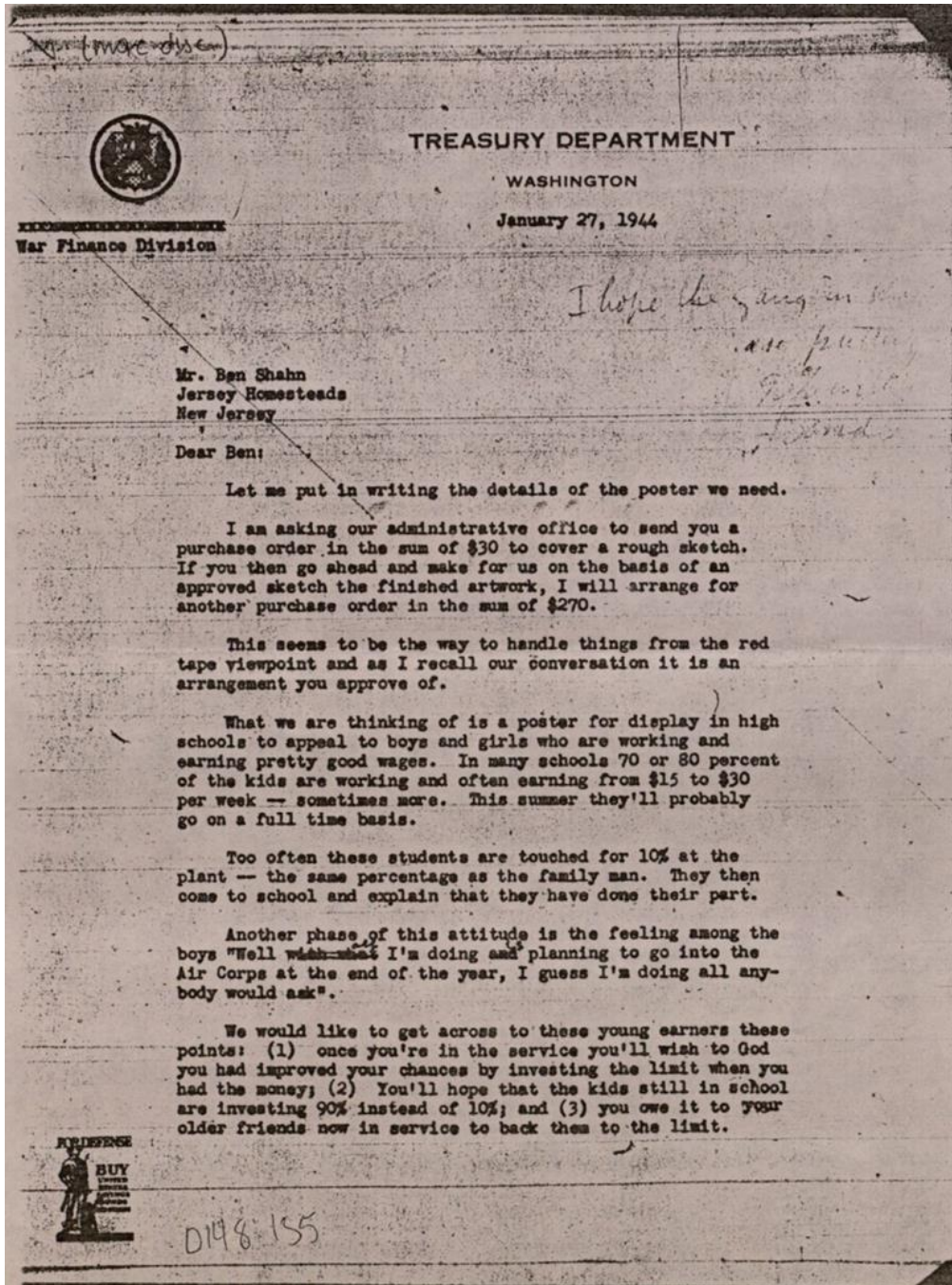
The fear induced is two-fold. First once the student is out of high school and conscripted into the military to fight the war, "you'll wish to God you had improved your chances by investing the limit when you had the money" and the suggested symbolism in the poster is "a young looking boy in uniform under extremely uncomfortable looking combat conditions...diving under a mud-filled slit fence to escape a strafing's bullets..." The message of course is that if those in school buy more war bonds today (the state solution to the social problem of war) then the war might end in victory sooner so that the potential draftee might avoid this fate.<sup>26</sup> The progress achieved for the state of course is that the child is now funding the state's deficit war financing instead of contributing his or her earnings to their family. The state can raise (unpopular) taxes less than they might have to without the fear-induced financial contributions of the youth. The overtly fear-

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<sup>26</sup> The Roosevelt Administration was successful in gaining legislation for the conscription of 900,000 people into the U.S. military, *prior* to the USA entering World War Two (Olson 2013), the USA's only peacetime draft.



inducing message of this poster might seem incongruent with state legitimacy in a democracy, but, after-all, the nation is at war.<sup>27</sup>



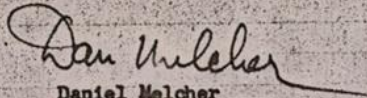
<sup>27</sup> Archival research for the final version of this poster was unsuccessful.

I have been thinking in terms of a poster depicting a young looking boy in uniform under extremely uncomfortable looking combat conditions -- perhaps a soaked, shivering youngster diving into a mud-filled slit fence to escape a strafing's bullets and muttering fervently "I hope the gang in school are putting 90% into War Bonds."

I am quite clear on the objectives of this poster and not necessarily prejudiced in any one means of achieving these objectives.

I certainly will appreciate it if you can give the problem some thought and let us have a sketch as to what you think would be a good solution.

Sincerely yours,



Daniel Melcher  
Acting Director  
Education Section  
War Finance Division

letter of Mar. 9 asked S. for sketch because 2 or 3  
mag.'s are interested in reprinting poster

DM:uml

148.156



#### IV. Conclusion

In this paper we build a model of *art statism*, where a state can use publicly-funded art to create preferences in the those experiencing this art for a larger, more discretionary, role for the state in society. In other words, art can realize *instrumental value* for the state.<sup>28</sup> We use the case-study method and find several cases where public art produced when the Roosevelt Administration is advocating the creation of programs laying the foundation of the modern welfare-state, a scope and magnitude of federal government intervention into people's lives unprecedented until this time.

We have also seen that some of the public art was altered during production, perhaps in order for the message propagated to remain legitimate in the eyes of the public in a democratic society. Relatedly we also find that art-statism during wartime may push the bounds of a legitimacy required under peacetime in a democracy.

To say that *some* public art is art-statism is not say that *all* public art is art-statism. It is only when the state seeks to increase its discretionary power in a democracy using art as the instrument that we have art-statism. Some public art may be national culture-building, helping to legitimize the state, not seeking increased state discretionary power.

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<sup>28</sup> Coffey (2012) describes how the Mexican state used the mural movement to realize instrumental value. She does not categorize this art production as “art-statism,” but rather “hegemonic construction” (188).

However methodologically as related to the case-study empirical methods used here,<sup>29</sup> we will heed the words of Carl Menger in *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences*.

But in this line of argument there are a number of fundamental errors. We admit quite unreservedly that *real* human phenomena are not strictly typical. We admit that just for this reason, and also as a result of the freedom of the human will – and we, of course, have no intention of denying this as a practical category – *empirical laws of absolute strictness* are out of the question in the realm of the phenomena of human activity (1985, 200, *emphasis in the original*).

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<sup>29</sup> In addition, the use of artist Ben Shahn as a basis for analysis suffers from selection bias, as does all research using the case-study method. It is well known that Shahn “espoused social causes,” both in his art and in his life. (It is for this reason I have chosen additional records from the archives not related to Shahn’s employment with US Government.) See below the *New York Times* obituary on Shahn in 1969. Shahn maybe was using his art to realize instrumental value for himself as well.

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## **Ben Shahn, Artist, Is Dead Here at 70**

Ben Shahn, one of America's most popular painters, who made his art serve the liberal social and political causes in which he believed, died late last night at Mount Sinai Hospital. He was 70 years old.

Mr. Shahn, who was also recognized as a first-rate commercial artist, poster maker and book illustrator, lived in Roosevelt, N. J.

He had been in the hospital for several weeks, and underwent major surgery Wednesday.

### **Painter and Polemicist**

In 1930, during a summer of work and soul-searching at Truro on Cape Cod, Ben Shahn came to a decision about the path he wanted to follow as an artist. "I had seen all the right pictures and read all the right books," he recalled, "but it still didn't add up to anything.

"Here I am, I said to my-

.Continued on Page 21, Column 1

**The New York Times**

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# Ben Shahn, Painter Who Espoused Social Causes, Dies

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2. self, 32 years old, the son of a carpenter. I like stories and people. The French school is not for me."

Behind him were a rigorous study of the life of the Williamsburg, 17 years of work as a commercial lithographer, night courses at City College, New York University and the National Academy of Design, his first one-man show and two long stays in Europe during which he had been influenced by the work of Georges Rouault and Raoul Dufly.

But cubism, abstraction and technical exercises for their own sake seemed to him barren. Then, as later, he wanted to make what he called "social communication" with his art. He found himself and his subject in the trial and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

With the 23 small gouaches and two large panels he had on the case, Mr. Shahn established himself as a strong painter-politician. Three decades later, these works have lost their power to shock, but to do them in that time—they were shown in New York and in Cambridge in 1932— took both political and artistic courage.

**A Radical Departure**  
The case still was bitterly controversial, yet Mr. Shahn depicted it unequivocally as a martyrdom of innocents. And his manner was a radical departure from the polite, sentimental, almost folkloric regionalism then dominant in American art.

The style he developed was basically realist—although late in life he did some abstract works—but it was a realism transmuted by poetry, magic and mystery. He was the first American to combine social observation with a kind of surrealism, and improbable as the term "social-surrealism" seems, Mr. Shahn, through his particular talents, made a success of it.

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Arriving immigrants are depicted in a detail from mural by Ben Shahn of Roosevelt, N. J., where the artist lived.

A more sympathetic view was given by James Thrall Soby, who organized a major retrospective show of Mr. Shahn's paintings, drawings, posters, book illustrations and photographs for the Museum of Modern Art in 1947 and who later edited books on his paintings and graphics. In an assessment of the artist, Mr. Soby said:

"He is one of the most authentic and powerful American humanists, an artist who translated the American scene into a strikingly personal statement of sympathy for mankind."

**Murals and Posters**  
Unlike many modern-day artists who seek only an intensely personal esthetic statement, Mr. Shahn was very much a public man. In the nineteen-thirties he undertook commissions for murals in public buildings. In the forties he did posters for the Office of War Information, for the Congress of Industrial Organizations and for the National Labor Relations Board.



Ben Shahn

From his earliest days he amused himself with scribbling and sketching. He won favor with neighborhood children by doing chalk portraits of sports heroes on the sidewalks. At the age of 16 he became an apprentice in a lithographer's shop, continuing his high school studies at night.

Intermittent work in lithography supported him through studies at college and at the National Academy of Design and through travels in 1925 and 1927-29 to France, Italy, North Africa and Spain.

He got his first one-man show at the Downtown Gallery in 1930. Then, in 1931, he began working on the Sacco-Vanzetti series with which he made his first big impact on the art world.

He followed that group with another series, 15 paintings and a panel on another famous trial of the day, the case of Tom Mooney. These works were admired by the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. He engaged Mr. Shahn to assist him in the execution of the "Man at the Crossroads" fresco for the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center. Twice he used art as social commentary.



Mr. Shahn's "The Assassination of Sacco and Vanzetti" part of series in which he first used art as social commentary.

Many of his pictures bore a labor message, or reflected his view of social significance. Among these were "Death of a Miner," "The World's Greatest Comics," "The Violin Player" and "East Dwell's Street."

Of these and similar paintings a critic once commented: "Often Shahn seems bent upon telling us that life is a terrible and a cruel and a heart-breaking world. Yet there are the stimulating gifts and keen imaginative flights. And his color can be such as an angel might use."

In 1954 Mr. Shahn received international recognition when 34 of his works were hung in the United States pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The Museum of Modern Art, which mounted the exhibition, chose the work of only two artists—Mr. Shahn and Willem de Kooning, an abstract expressionist. Among major Shahn paintings on display in Italy that year were "The Red Staircase," "Spring" and "Compulsion" with Clarinet and Tin Horn.

Appointed by Harvard University, he named Mr. Shahn in 1956 by naming the Charles F. Johnson Professor for that year. The following year the university published his lectures under the title "The Shape of Content." The book sums up Mr. Shahn's views on the role of the artist, his education, his place in academic life and his status as a nonconformist. On this last point he said:

"The artist occupies a unique position vis-à-vis the society in which he lives. However dependent upon it he may be for his livelihood, he is still somewhat removed from its immediate struggles for social status or for economic supremacy. He has no really vested interest in the status quo."

Mr. Shahn was profoundly moved by the prospect of thermonuclear war, which was the theme of an exhibition at the Downtown Gallery in 1961. Reviewing it for The Times, Brian O'Doherty said:

"The new series is called 'The Saga of the Lucky Dragon.' In it, the old master is mastery."

"The Lucky Dragon," its name now a classic irony, was the Japanese fishing boat dashed by lethal fallout after the United States H-bomb test at Bikini on March 1, 1954. The shadow of that tragedy is one that falls more and more urgently over all of us these days, so that to see Mr. Shahn's exhibition becomes almost a duty. For in one of these superb services art can perform, and rarely does, he takes the inhuman energies that threaten to destroy us and simply puts them in human perspectives. It is impossible to contemplate the Bomb. At the Downtown Gallery, one can."

Expoused Liberal Causes  
Mr. Shahn's belief that an artist should be actively engaged in the life of his time led him to lend his name and prestige to a great many liberal causes. In the fifties this brought attacks by right-wingers and attempts to have his work excluded from government-sponsored art shows that were sent abroad. In 1956, he was summoned before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, but he declined to discuss his political affiliations.

In the same year, Amerika, the State Department magazine that is distributed in the Soviet Union, carried a 10-page article on his art. The Russian, however, did not like what they saw and declared that his paintings and sketches reflected abstract decadence.

Mr. Shahn received many awards for his work. Among them were the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Graphic Arts and a prize from the Concrete Art Gallery in Washington.

He was a member of Artists Equity, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

With his easy smile, white mustache, closely cropped white hair and heavily muscled body on a large frame, Mr. Shahn had the look of an amiable, avuncular bear. But there was a temper behind the smile, and he did not welcome casual visitors to his home and studio in the New Jersey community of Roosevelt.

"I used to meet sightseers with a brush between my teeth," he told an interviewer in 1965. "The mumble-tyed conversation pricked quickly. I'd only take the brush out if I wanted to get involved. . . . I don't like to talk shop."

A one-room building behind the house was the place where he did most of his work. Although it had the cluttered look of most artist studios, he knew exactly where to find whatever he wanted. He had a file of his works and a notebook catalogue that told him which drawer held which picture.

Mr. Shahn married twice. His first wife was Tillie Goldstein, whom he wed in 1922. The couple had two children, Judith and Ezra. The marriage was terminated by divorce, and in 1935 he married Bernarda Bryson, also an artist. They had three children, Susan, Jonathan and Abigail.

A funeral service will be held at 11 A.M. tomorrow at the Roosevelt (N.J.) Cemetery.