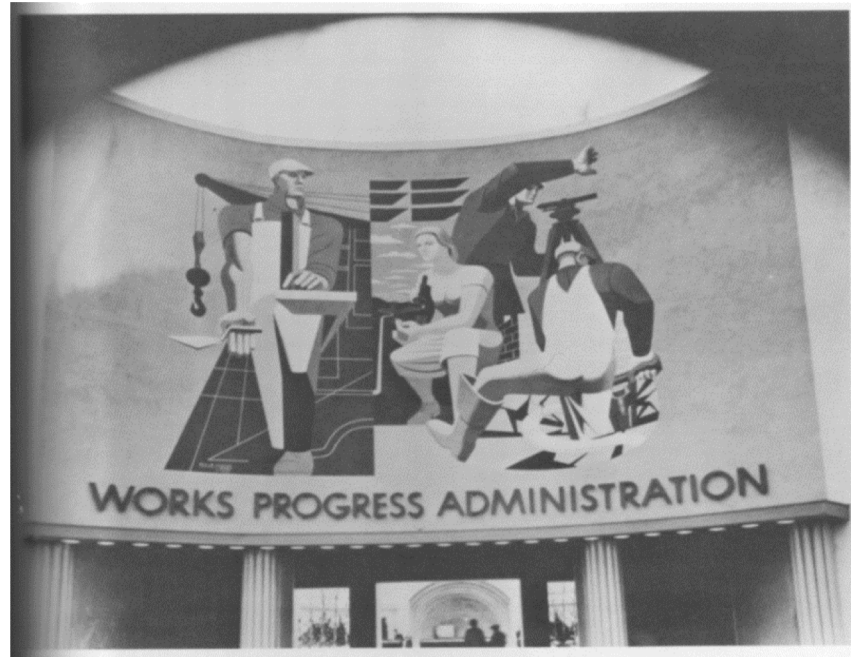


Heuristic on Art-Statism: How State Art-Production Can Create Voter-Preference  
for a State with Greater Discretionary Power,  
with case studies from the New Deal



WPA Pavilion  
at 1939 World's Fair,  
Queens, NY USA

Cameron M Weber  
Public Choice Society  
March 15, 2019

# Heuristic on Art-Statism

## Overview:

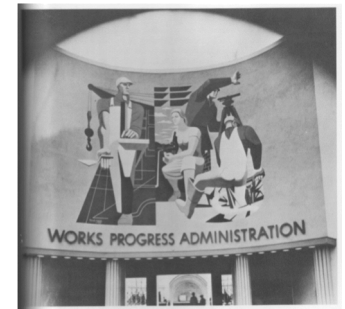
We use state-theory and fiscal sociology (Wagner 2007) to build a model of ‘art-statism’. Given the time-limited and depersonalized nature of political exchange we might expect non-logical rational voting to be expressed in images as simple as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (Brennan 2008). Art is an ideal image producer. Using the case study and archival method we can show how state art-production can have the *intent* to grow the discretionary state.



## Heuristic on Art-Statism: How State Art-Production Can Create Voter Preference for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

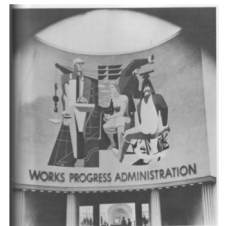
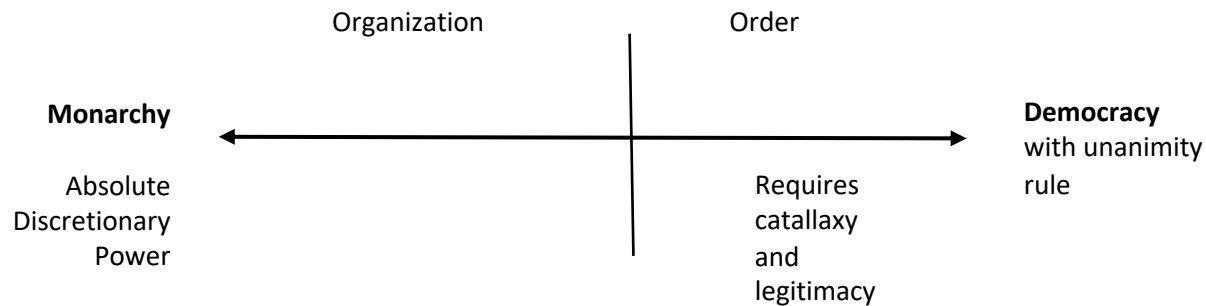
Our concept of the state starts with Max Weber [1919] *Politics as a Vocation* where the state,

- 1) Claims a “monopoly of legitimate physical violence”,
- 2) Rules over others with this perceived legitimacy, and
- 3) Strives for power “for its own sake”



# Heuristic on Art-Statism

Richard Wagner 2009 *Fiscal Sociology and the Theory of Public Finance* creates a dichotomy and continuum for forms of government. A self-interested state seeks to move leftward along this continuum as it grows its discretionary power.

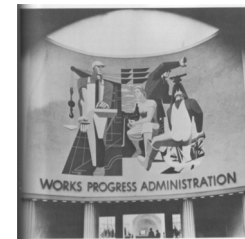


## Heuristic on Art-Statism

Further, Anthony de Jasay 1998 *The State* finds that the state has self-interest, where we “consider(s) the state as a live institution which behaves as if it has a will of its own and a single hierarchy of ends....”

A self-interested state seeks to grow its (legitimate) 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.



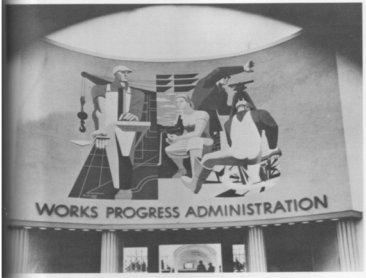
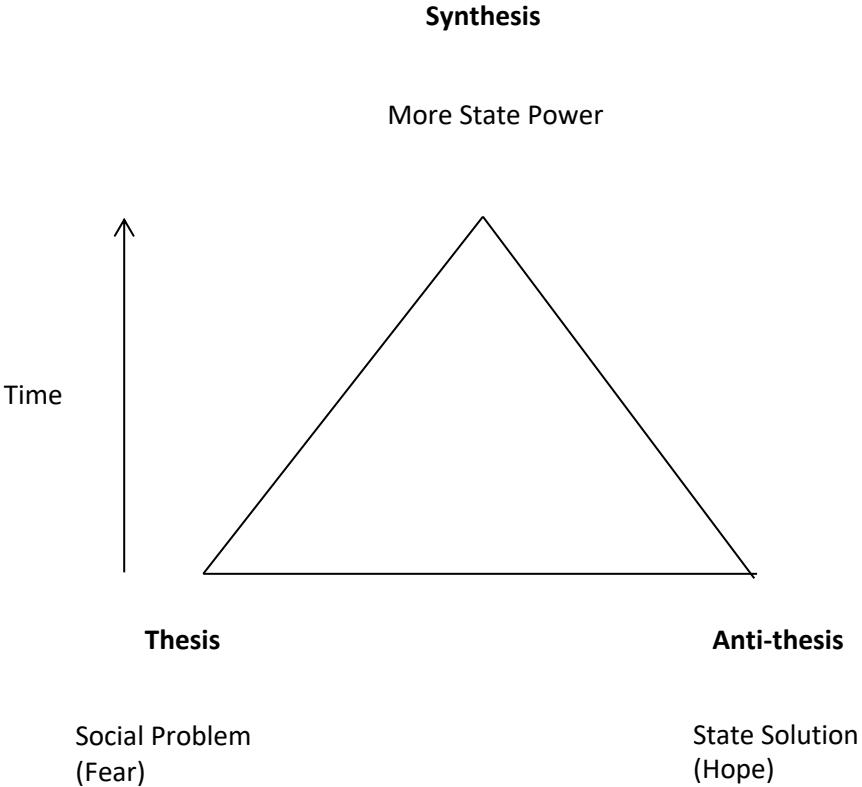
## Heuristic on Art-Statism

State art-production can use ‘fear’ and ‘hope’ in those experiencing public art to create preferences for a larger for the state in society.

“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” (Max Weber [1919] 2004, 34).



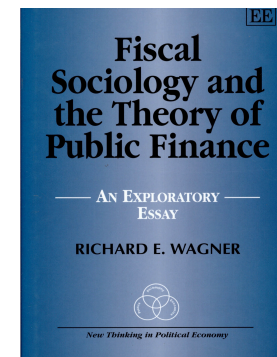
# Heuristic on Art-Statism: How State Art-Production Can Create Voter Preference for a State with Greater Discretionary Power



# Heuristic on Art-Statism

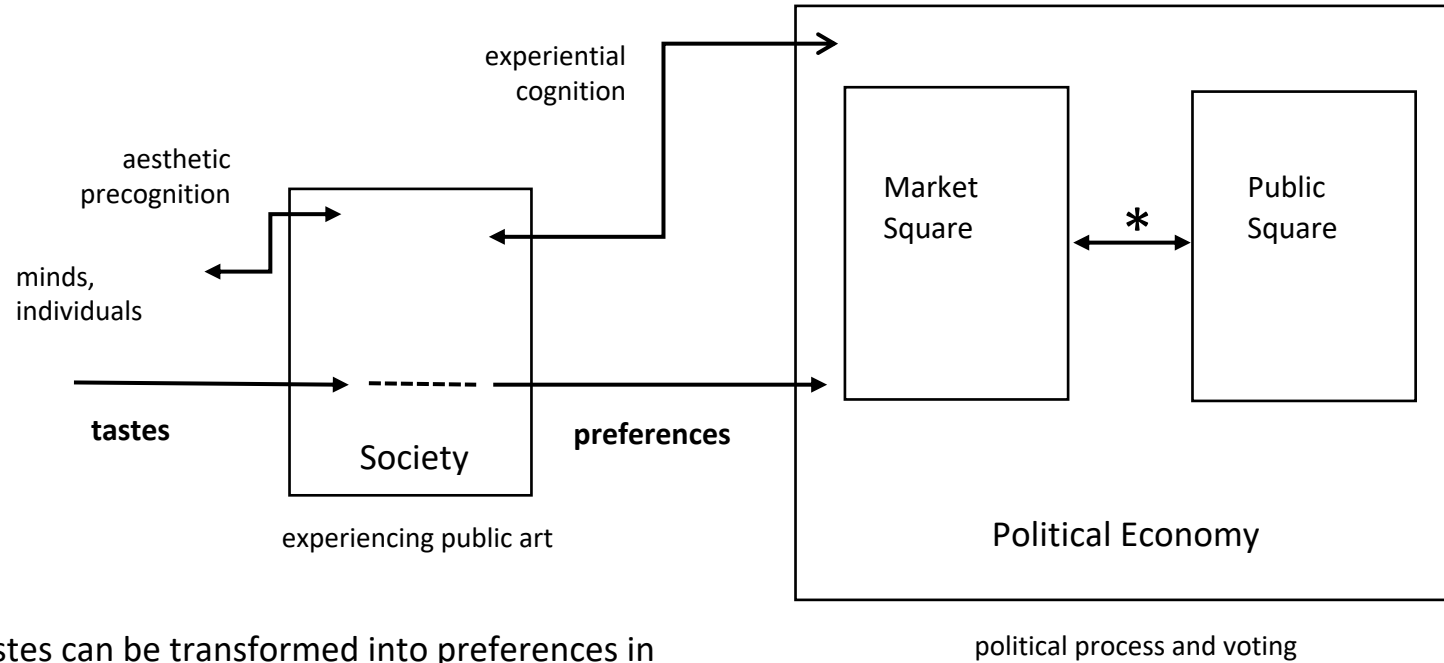
Wagner 2007 uses binary structure of mind theory,

“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” (21).





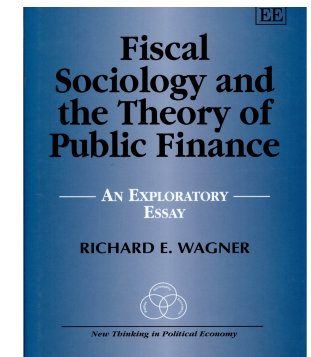
# Heuristic on Art-Statism



Tastes can be transformed into preferences in those experiencing art in society, for example a museum exhibit, a play, public art

Wagner 2007, additions by author

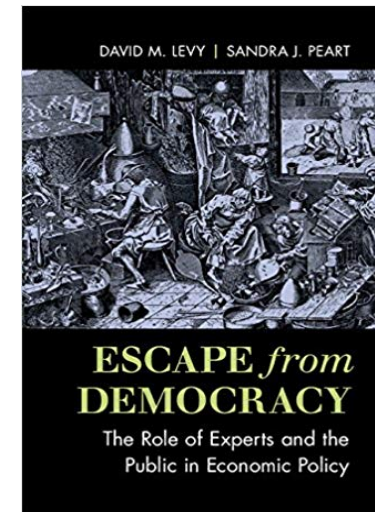
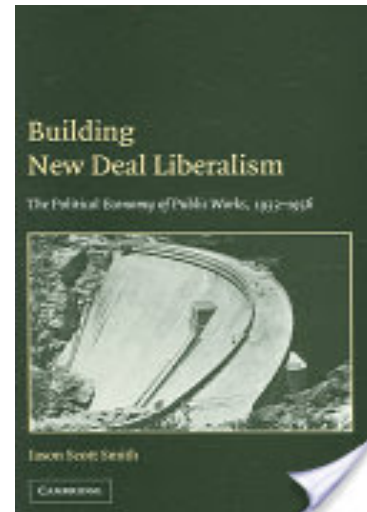
\* Site of mutualism and/or conflict



# Art-Statism: How State Art-Production can Create Voter-Preference for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

## Motivation for research:

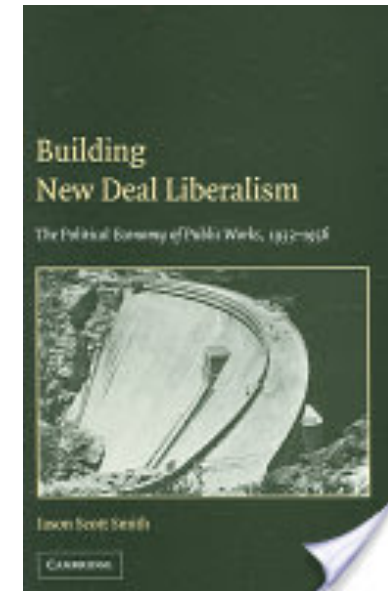
Jason Scott Smith (2006) finds the massive federal public works of the New Deal inculcates in the population preferences for a larger for the federal government in people's lives, including the institutionalization of interventionist Keynesian economics, and, rule by experts, eg. today Levy and Peart (2017)



## Art-Statism: How State Art-Production can Create Voter Preference for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

### Motivation for research (cont.):

Our present work explores how the *art* created under the New Deal helps to accomplish the same social structure and mindset for a larger role for the state in society as do the *public works*.

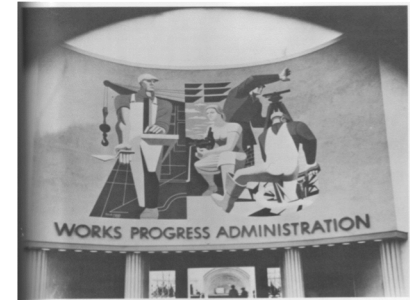


## Art-Statism: Voter Preference-Creation for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

Our first case study\*

Artist Ben Shahn's engagement with a mural for the then new Social Security Building (ca. 1940), espousing the New Deal welfare-state programs, many of which have become commonplace today

\* For other art-statism cases, not necessarily of the New Deal, see my website, 'dissertation' page, at [cameroneconomics.com](http://cameroneconomics.com)



## Art-Statism: Voter Preference-Creation for a State with Greater Discretionary Power



Bourdieu 1984  
finds that social  
realism is readily  
decoded by the  
“working classes”

This art creates Fear

Photo by author,  
In today's Voice of  
American building  
2012

Ben Shahn's "The Meaning of Social Security" (ca. 1940), Washington, DC

# Art-Statism Case Studies

(COPY) Please return to the section of -see  
Art. 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

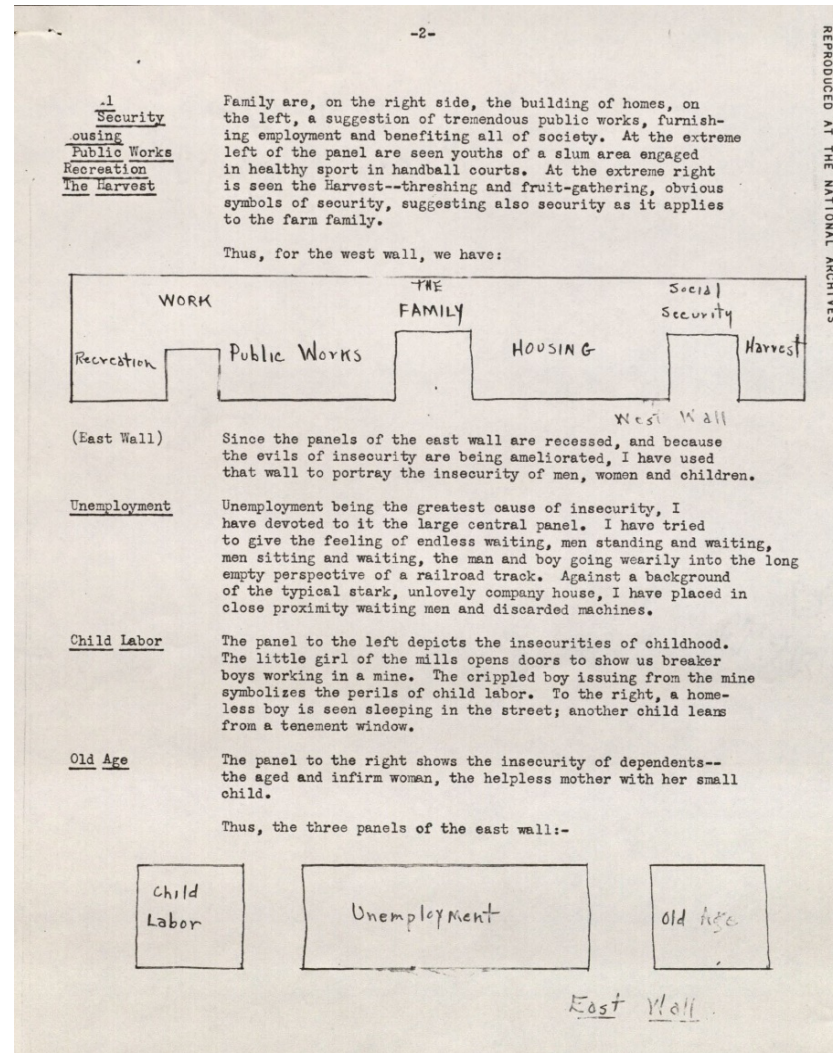
Work

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Hope:  
The state solution  
to the social problem  
of fear

Ben Shahn Social Security Murals (ca. 1940) cont. From the National Archives.

# Art-Statism: Voter Preference-Creation for a State with Greater Discretionary Power



Fear:  
The social problem(s)

Ben Shahn Social Security Murals (ca. 1940) cont.  
From the National Archives.

# Art-Statism: Voter Preference-Creation for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

Our second case study\*

## Ben Shahn and War Finance (1944)


- For other art-statism cases, not necessarily of the New Deal, see my website, 'dissertation' page, at [cameroneconomics.com](http://cameroneconomics.com)





# Art-Statism: Preference-Creation for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

*more disc*



TREASURY DEPARTMENT  
WASHINGTON  
January 27, 1944  
War Finance Division

*I hope the gang in the  
are putting  
War Bonds*

Mr. Ben Shahn  
Jersey Homesteads  
New Jersey

Dear Ben:

Let us put in writing the details of the poster we need.

I am asking our administrative office to send you a purchase order in the sum of \$30 to cover a rough sketch. If you then go ahead and make for us on the basis of an approved sketch the finished artwork, I will arrange for another purchase order in the sum of \$270.


This seems to be the way to handle things from the red tape viewpoint and as I recall our conversation it is an arrangement you approve of.

What we are thinking of is a poster for display in high schools to appeal to boys and girls who are working and earning pretty good wages. In many schools 70 or 80 percent of the kids are working and often earning from \$15 to \$30 per week — sometimes more. This summer they'll probably go on a full time basis.

Too often these students are touched for 10% at the plant — the same percentage as the family man. They then come to school and explain that they have done their part.

Another phase of this attitude is the feeling among the boys "Well ~~with what~~ I'm doing ~~and~~ planning to go into the Air Corps at the end of the year, I guess I'm doing all anybody would ask".

We would like to get across to these young earners these points: (1) once you're in the service you'll wish to God you had improved your chances by investing the limit when you had the money; (2) You'll hope that the kids still in school are investing 90% instead of 10%; and (3) you owe it to your older friends now in service to back them to the limit.



D148.155

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 sputtering 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,  
*Dan Malcher*  
Daniel Malcher  
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*

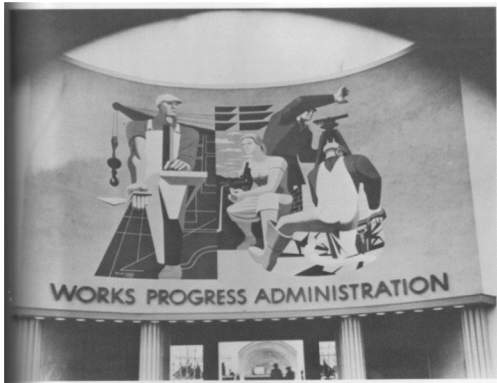
DM:ml  
148.156

Fear and  
Hope in  
time of war

From Harvard  
University Ben  
Shahn archives

# Heuristic on Art-Statism: How State Art-Production Can Create Voter-Preference for a State with Greater Discretionary Power, with case studies from the New Deal

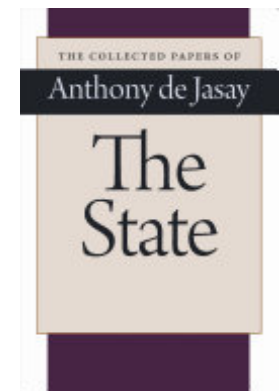
In conclusion



WPA Pavilion  
at 1939 World's Fair,  
Queens, NY USA

## Art-Statism: Voter Preference-Creation for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

“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*).



## Art-Statism: Voter Preference Creation for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

### Conclusion:

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. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Heuristic on Art-Statism: How State Art-Production Can Create Voter-Preference for a State with Greater Discretionary Power

