

Jason Loeb
Signal in Corn Pit
May 28 – July 9, 2022

“[C]ulture suggests the idea of the State. We find no basis for State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our best self.”

—Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)

A declaration of one’s artistic constitution. A public statement of independence by an artwork’s maker. There’s a whole apparatus designed to defend the work from critical threats: We often find its creator patrolling the exhibition, on guard against every danger to its quasi-state of exception. An exhibition might also require state-like defensiveness, marshaling strategic intelligence, personnel, and the fortification of institutions in anticipation of an onslaught, a kind of tapping of one’s strategic cultural reserves. We expect the creator—like the sovereign—to express a monopoly over all decisions, the temporary right to determine the rules of the game. Both art and the state are partial to a sort of premature utopia: ending struggle for all time in the imaginary so it need not resolve it in the real. The imaginative self-legislation of art acts as a kind of training ground for self-cultivation (consider the enclosed world of disciplined self-branding); it’s a sphere that encourages contemplation rather than engagement. Cultivated disinterestedness—the imperative to “lack a purpose”—resembles the indifference the state compels us to maintain regarding those who lack a purpose (the unproductive, the under- or unemployed).

Grains provided the subsistence basis for all the earliest significant agrarian states; the anthropologist James C. Scott argues this is because they were the most easily taxable: “The key to the nexus between grains and states lies in the fact that only the cereal grains can serve as a basis for taxation: visible, divisible, assessable, storable, transportable, and ‘rationable’” (*Against The Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, 2017). The production of grain requires a series of minute separations, historically involving repetitive labor and causing what today would be called a repetitive stress injury, shaping our bodies to new purposes; our skeletal signature bore the effects of these work routines. The words “culture” and “agriculture” both derive from the Latin “colere,” meaning “to tend, guard; to till, cultivate”; this illustrates the continuity between the tending of crops and the later conception of cultural production as an avenue of personal freedom and cultivation. Francis Bacon played on this connection when he wrote of “the culture and manurance of minds,” drawing a relation between culture, the training of the human mind, and feces. What better to replenish the national land than the excrement, the caloric intake of the refined?

Jason Loeb lives and works in New York. He attended the Whitney Independent Study Program in 2011, received his MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007, and a certificate from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 2004. Recent solo exhibitions include *Kangaroo Stele*, Éclair, Berlin; *Stele Trail*, Ludlow 38, New York; *Private Matters*, Maxwell Graham / Essex Street, New York; and *TITLE STACK SINK RELEASE*, Kunsthalle Fribourg, Fribourg.

Signal in Corn Pit will be on view at 55 Hester Street in New York City from May 28 to July 9, 2022 Wednesday through Saturday, 11AM to 6PM. For additional information, please contact the gallery at 917-675-6681 or info@maxwellgraham.biz.