

A SUBJECT OF THOUGHT COMMITTING STUART BRISLEY'S
PERFORMANCE *BREATH* TO MEMORY ON 29 OCTOBER 2014,
ROYAL ACADEMY LIFE ROOM, LONDON

Gracchus Babeuf and the Conspiracy of Equals 1796

Manifesto of Equals

Source: Ph. Buonarroti. *La conspiration pour l'égalité*, Editions Sociales, Paris. 1957

Written by Gracchus Babeuf and Sylvain Marechal, tow of the conspirators, the Manifesto didn't meet with unanimous support. Especially contested was Marechal's "Let the arts perish, if need be, as long as real equality remains."

Real equality, final goal of social art

Condorcet

People of France!

For fifteen centuries you lived as a slave and, consequently, unhappy. For the last six years you barely breathe, waiting for independence, freedom and equality.

EQUALITY! The first wish of nature, the first need of man, the first knot of all legitimate association! People of France! You were not more blessed than the other nations that vegetate on this unfortunate globe! Everywhere and at all times the poor human race, handed over to more or less deft cannibals, served as an object for all ambitions, as feed for all tyrannies. Everywhere and at all times men were lulled with beautiful words; at no time and in no place was the thing itself ever obtained through the word. From time immemorial they hypocritically repeat; *all men are equal*; and from time immemorial the most degrading and monstrous inequality insolently weighs upon the human race. As long as there have been human societies the most beautiful of humanity's rights is recognized without contradiction, but was only able to be put in

practice one time: equality was nothing but a beautiful and sterile legal fiction. And now that it is called for with an even stronger voice we are answered: be quiet, you wretches! Real equality is nothing but a chimera; be satisfied with conditional equality; you're all equal before the law. What more do you want, filthy rabble? Legislators, you who hold power, rich landowners, it is now your turn to listen.

Are we not all equal? This principle remains uncontested, because unless touched by insanity, you can't say it's night when it's day.

Well then! We claim to live and die equal, the way we were born: we want this *real* equality or death; *that's* what we need.

And we'll have this real equality, at whatever price. Unhappy will be those who stand between it and us! Unhappy will be those who resist a wish so firmly expressed.

The French Revolution was nothing but a precursor of another revolution, one that will be bigger, more solemn, and which will be the last.

The people marched over the bodies of kings and priests who were in league against it: it will do the same to the new tyrants, the new political Tartuffes seated in the place of the old.

What do we need besides equality of rights?

We need not only that equality of rights written into the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; we want it in our midst, under the roofs of our houses. We consent to everything for it, *to make a clean slate so that we hold to it alone*. Let all the arts perish, if need be, as long as real equality remains!

Legislators and politicians, you have no more genius than you do good faith; gutless and rich landowners, in vain you attempt to neutralize our holy enterprise by saying: They do nothing but reproduce that agrarian law asked for more than once in the past.

Slanderers, be silent: and in the silence of your confusion listen to our demands, dictated by nature and based on justice.

The Agrarian law, or the partitioning of land, was the spontaneous demand of some unprincipled soldiers, of some towns moved more by their instinct than by reason. We reach for something more sublime and more just: *the common good* or the *community of goods*! No more individual property in land: *the land belongs to no one*. We demand, we want, the common enjoyment of the fruits of the land: *the fruits belong to all*.

We declare that we can no longer put up with the fact that the great majority work and sweat for the smallest of minorities.

Long enough, and for too long, less than a million individuals have disposed of that which belongs to 20 million of their like, their equals.

Let it at last end, this great scandal that our descendants will never believe existed! Disappear at last, revolting distinctions between rich and poor, great and small, masters and servants, *rulers and ruled*.

Let there no longer be any difference between people than that of age and sex. Since all have the same faculties and the same needs, let there then be for them but one education, but one food. They are satisfied with one sun and one air for all: why then would the same portion and the same quality of food not suffice for each of them?

Already the enemies of the most natural order of things we can imagine raise a clamor against us.

They say to us: You are disorganizers and seditious; you want nothing but massacres and loot.

PEOPLE OF FRANCE

We won't waste our time responding to them; we tell you: the holy enterprise that we are organizing has no other goal than to put an end to civil dissension and public misery.

Never before has a vaster plan been conceived of or carried out. Here and there a few men of genius, a few men, have spoken in a low and trembling voice. None have had the courage to tell the whole truth.

The moment for great measures has arrived. Evil has reached its height: it covers the face of the earth. Under the name of politics, chaos has reigned for too many centuries. Let everything be set in order and take its proper place once again. Let the supporters of justice and happiness organize in the voice of equality. The moment has come to found the REPUBLIC OF EQUALS, this great home open to all men. The day of general restitution has arrived. Groaning families, come sit at the common table set by nature for all its children.

PEOPLE OF FRANCE

The purest of all glories was thus reserved for you! Yes it is you who the first should offer the world this touching spectacle.

Ancient habits, antique fears, would again like to block the establishment of the *Republic of Equals*. The organization of real equality, the only one that responds to all needs, without causing any victims, without costing any sacrifice, will not at first please everyone. The selfish, the ambitious, will tremble with rage. Those who possess unjustly will cry out about injustice. The loss of the enjoyments of the few, solitary pleasures, personal ease will cause lively regret to those heedless of the pain of others. The lovers of absolute power, the henchmen of arbitrary authority, will with difficulty bow their superb heads before the level of real equality. Their shortsightedness will understand with difficulty the imminent future of common happiness; but what can a few thousand malcontents do against a mass of happy men, surprised to have searched so long for a happiness that they had in their hands.

The day after this real revolution, they'll say with astonishment: What? Common happiness was so easy to obtain? All we had to do was want it? Why oh why didn't we desire it sooner? Did they really have to make us speak of it so many times? Yes, without a doubt, one lone man on earth richer, stronger than his like, than his equals, and the balance is thrown off: crime and unhappiness are on earth.

PEOPLE OF FRANCE

By what sign will you now recognize the excellence of a constitution? ...That which rests in its entirety on real equality is the only one that can suit you and fulfill all your wishes.

The aristocratic constitutions of 1791 and 1795 tightened your chains instead of breaking them. That of 1793 was a great step towards true equality, and we had never before approached it so closely. But it did not yet touch the goal, nor reach common happiness, which it nevertheless solemnly consecrated as its great principle.

PEOPLE OF FRANCE

Open your eyes and your hearts to the fullness of happiness: recognize and proclaim with us the **REPUBLIC OF EQUALS**.

sphere and civil society.

what goes down, comes up

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