

Lóránd Hegyi

Excesses and liberating rituals – an artist's way of playing with masks Comments on the drawings of Günter Brus

The drawings by Günter Brus with their picture-and-text combinations seem to conjure up physical injuries, painful wounds, or embarrassing psychological situations. The seductive, somewhat exotic and strange poetry of lines incorporates both text and images, organic shapes and artifacts, human bodies and implements, architectural spaces and places of nature in a shared sensuous entity. Consequently, even the smallest drawings seem to be heavy and enigmatic, unsettling and ominous, dramatic and imposing, almost always obsessive and inquiring—they brook no tranquility, no indifference, no *laissez-faire* attitude. They invariably provoke direct statements, they elicit personal and emotional responses, and they never allow viewers to step out of their imaginative, virtual space. Viewers feel that they are pulled into this sensuous, hyper-intensive, possessive world, both as voyeurs and designers who become aware of certain intimacies and disclosures without, however, comprehending the entire structure.

Radicalism, an uncompromising attitude, a propensity for drama and excess, as well as astute analytical and highly precise observations of the psychopathological phenomena and mental mechanisms at play in manipulating power, ideology, and religion—these have been the salient features of Günter Brus's work for years, from the time of Viennese Actionism to today. His vast graphic oeuvre, regardless of the period and cycle of works, centers on the question of how hypocritical, mendacious, and manipulative systems can be fought, it being understood that exposing ideological, political, reli-

gious, and moralist manipulations is inextricably linked with the relentless investigation of the core aspects of such psychological and mental processes as self-recognition and self-liberation.

Brus's figures emerge from a provocative, bewildering, and astonishing combination of verbal inventions and constantly changing, provisional, and morbid forms. The plastic design of these bodies always alludes to a textual legitimation, but even the textual is subjected to an independent, coherent, and immanent paralogic. In the obscure depths of these verbal inventions lurk personal experiences, fears, anger, tensions, disturbances, discontent, tormenting despair, feelings of love and hatred, the unquenchable thirst for revolt, the yearning to find one's home; all of these emotional states refer to social, cultural, political, ideological, mental, historical, and psychological realities. This fighting spirit, this incessant restlessness, this passionate search for authenticity, and this blind hatred of lies and hypocrisy invest Brus's oeuvre with uncontrollably dramatic tensions and violent eruptions, with fervent, bitter, and excessive exaggerations, but also with dangerously poignant and painfully accurate judgments. Every sheet in his interminable book of drawings is suffused with the unfettered energy of a prophet, of someone who resembles a figure from the Old Testament, who is committed to the judgment, who is radically obsessed by the notions of judging and convicting. This self-tormenting act of passing judgment on oneself is vehement, rigorous, caustic, and merciless, and it feeds into the cathartic process of searching for the genuine.