

Introduction

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Did I then have something so very particular to say? But what have I said? What is there to say? To say that one *is*? To say that one writes? To say that one is a writer? A need to communicate what? A need to communicate that one has a need to communicate? That one is in the act of communicating? Writing says that it is there, and nothing more, and here we are back again in that hall of mirrors where the words refer to one another, reflect one another to infinity without ever meeting anything other than their own shadow.

George Perec, *'The Gnocchi of Autumn or
An Answer to a Few Questions Concerning Myself'*

Susan Morris is a mark on a page. Or many marks, on many pages herein. She appears as blocks and voids, numbers, lines and chalk-dustings, in saturated colours and faint greys. It is possible to know Susan Morris through these pictures, without having a clue how she might present herself in person. How she might talk in conversation.

Susan Morris is a writer. Despite how the pages ahead appear. (The one word-laden piece by her is the poem that appears at the end of this introduction, and it took some coaxing for her to allow its inclusion.) Distressingly, she grasps the failure of language.

Tacked to her studio wall, she keeps a diary. On a long sheet of paper, with a horizontal line drawn across it, she each day takes a nail and hammers a hole, from left to right along the line. Each hole is typically annotated with its numbered date. Why some dates don't appear remains a mystery to me. Their omission does make me aware, however, that the borders of each void are diaphanous.

I realize that Susan is essentially a florid writer. On pages filled with monotonous straight lines, calendars, planners, scientific graphs and motion capture-drawings, she describes herself as a warm body, present each day in infinite measurements. The first series of works in *Sontag Montag* consists of grids composed of blocked-in sections of colour that diagram Susan's life by strange criteria: her menstrual cycles, her success at showing up at her studio, her tendency to cry. These are her year planners, based on a store-bought form, caught between their stated purpose and her retrospective use of them – they neither plan, nor explain what has happened.

Next are the Actigraphs, which Susan creates by wearing what looks like a faceless wristwatch, a device that charts her biorhythms to generate print-outs of oscillating bands of colour. No labels on the x- and y-axes are necessary to 'read' these graphs. Her plumb line drawings are altogether different in appearance from the two preceding series, yet once more utilise her body as an infallible writing instrument, logging her being as words cannot.

Her flight from language – impossible – is evident in the motion-capture drawings she has recently begun making in tandem with her plumb lines, charting the motion that goes on in between each pluck of the string, suggesting her body's movement might be visible in a two-dimensional print-out. The long, droning sheets of plumb lines are obviously compulsive in nature (all her series are 'ongoing'), but the motion-capture drawings up the ante of ridiculousness, the futility of Susan's attempt to 'capture' herself. What we see are beautiful scribbles.

Susan is the writer Perec describes, a frustrated captive in a 'hall of mirrors'. Her search for shadows is the subject of Margaret Iverson's essay in this book, which identifies her position as an artist within the frameworks of Freudian and Lacanian theory, and goes on to link her work to the historical precedents of Surrealist writers and W.G. Sebald. Iverson discusses how these shadows might be

conceptualised, while Briony Fer explores their experience, their nagging nature. Fer notes the odd logic of the artist's urge to schematise subjective experience, but doesn't call it peculiar, instead touching upon how communicability is present in Susan's work. Ed Krčma addresses the *Plumb Line Drawings* specifically, for their relation to the history of drawing and the trace, their place beyond language, their departure from expressionism to arrive at 'drawing Degree Zero'.

Knowing better, Susan forced herself to jot down a poem – the verbal sort – every day for a period of several months in 2008. These works are desperate – their quick composition evident in their urgency to rhyme, their use of quotidian phrases. Most of them were composed on the short bike ride to her studio, to be done with before starting her day. Yet they're comforting in a strange sense, with soft beats much like school children's skipping rhymes. They are regressive in their basic need to sound out words, to create patterns. To describe, to chart being, is to surface aberration. If these patterns never cohere as patterns should, there Susan is.