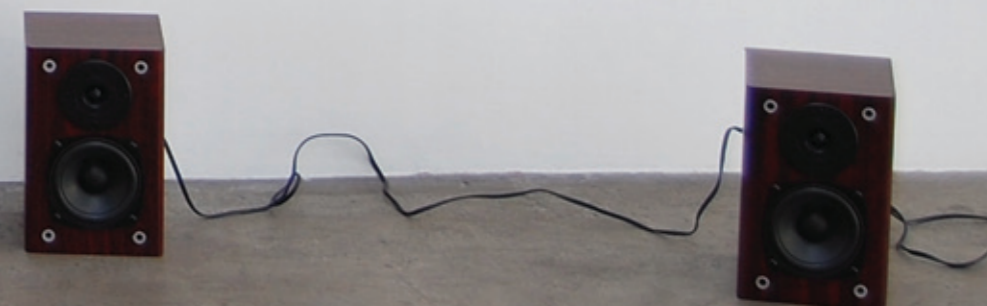


**LOCKY MORRIS**  
FROM DAY ONE  
APRIL – MAY





**This building** Upright piano elements, LP, framed photograph, powered speakers, CDR (looped audio)  
Dimensions variable (approx 50 x 150 x 145 cm) 2010



**From day one** Illuminated glass display case, carpet, crumpled card (child's shirt collar insert)  
63.5 x 63.5 x 68 cm 2008



**Acid free** Empty Rennie packaging, 35mm slide trays, wall lights Dimensions variable 2007-2009

## EVERYMAN'S ANTACID ANTIDISCIPLINE

'To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds another production, called "consumption". The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order.'

- de Certeau

I'm not totally sure I can agree with de Certeau that there is a production called consumption, or even "consumption" any more than I believe there is a black called white. But let's go with it for the moment...

The Good Friday agreement and its multifarious fallout have left more than one artist from the North of Ireland at a crossroads in their practice. Uncertainties were often at the heart of the practice of artists such as Willie Doherty, and uncertainties never simply disappear; they transform, instead, into different uncertainties, each equipped with their preferred strategies of interpretation. But struggle and repression too have a similar mercurial quality, frequently slipping away through the cracks rather than yielding to our attention, hiding out ready to reappear elsewhere, rather than, as we are always prone to expect, being annihilated by our attention.

For Locky Morris, the facts of colonial life were often the stuff of his work, as he laboured at making visible surveillance technologies, or secret communications, small but never futile acts of resistance, such as found in his work around the "comms", cigarette papers covered in tiny writing bringing news from the outside to prisoners inside the H-Blocks, often furtively delivered mouth to mouth in the guise of a kiss.

In the wake of the new order, there has been some apparent alteration in his overt concerns, an increasing concentration on the everyday and domestic being the most remarkable. But these alterations may be less significant than a shift in the subject matter of the work might suggest. In an important sense, perhaps, making exactly this matrix visible in the contemporary scene has become a pursuit with even more widespread application. Now if we live in the era of the military ceasefire on the island, we live also in a world in which tactics of resistance have a new, urgent place, where the struggle has reached the home front. And there, a new type of mobilisation is required.

In 2008, Morris began using what is referred to as the Scots Presbyterian church, a deconsecrated building, which in its time had been a meeting hall, religious venue and an army barracks (with connections to the events of Bloody Sunday) and is now 'earmarked' to become a boutique hotel. Markers of other incarnations abound; and not just the bric-à-brac of previous inhabitants, for somewhere in that dust, of course, must be the skin of long silent hymn-singers. For the artist, it has become a unique space in which the everyday and the past seem to be in constant conversation. At the centre of his mother's tankstation show, Morris created an installation which relates directly to the space of his Presbyterian church studio, and more specifically to a piano abandoned there. Like the Australian pioneer of the distressed piano,

improvisational composer, Ross Bolleter,<sup>1</sup> Morris finds a way to tap into the buried narratives, trajectories past, of the space with the help of the piano and its unique sonic shapes.

The piece, *This building*, is composed of the top lid of the piano – imported from Derry with its potent dust still in place, above which is displayed a photo, taken by the artist himself, looking into the room in which the piano was originally placed, alongside an album of Chopin music, which the artist came across in a local second-hand store when on a mission to buy up old vinyl for a different, large scale public artwork he was planning.<sup>2</sup> By happenstance, the cover of this album of Chopin music<sup>3</sup> shows an image remarkably similar to that in Morris' photograph, a room equipped with a piano promising cosy, communal music-making. (The chronological order is important, since it was only after taking the photo that the artist came upon the album cover.) As a soundtrack to this installation, Morris created a piano loop (played on the found piano, in its original location) backed by samples of other sounds found around the church, most notably the metallic creaking of a gurney which has somehow found its way into the building. The piano, of course, is long ruined and provides an unexpected series of tones, which are blended into a compelling 'non'-composition.

In common with Bolleter, Morris would seem to enlist what de Certeau reads as "tactics" rather than "strategies", shunning confrontation to create unpredictable texts in the interstices of consumerism.

Morris has often repeated this "tactic" of bringing objects from his everyday experience into the gallery setting and allowing them to create an ambience that is both homely, humorous and touching, while at the same time, in a reflux action, re-reading and destabilising the everyday from which the objects have been wrenched. Nowhere is this more pointedly, or indeed poignantly, enacted than in a sculpture constructed from the artist's discarded antacid medicine. Since childhood, Morris has suffered acid reflux, commonly referred to as heartburn. Though used to describe intestinal pain in a region ("under the ribs" in the parlance of the antacid manufacturer<sup>4</sup>) previously assumed to be related to the heart, it also strikes as a term that might as easily describe the sensation of nostalgia, a sense that visiting the past is agonisingly impossible on some levels, and very painfully possible on others.

In the work, *Acid free*, a series of blister packs which formally held Rennie's ("stomach tablets") a mild antacid which aims to neutralise excess (or out of place acid) created during digestion, are arranged in three photographic slide carousels. There could, the artist points out, be many more of these units. But why? Here, time is encoded into the materials of what is also a minimalist sculpture, so that constantly repeated units become dramatic, autobiographical. The effect is deeply unsteady, at times seems an almost snide take on art conversation, at others a simple and direct statement, or an evocative, melancholic meditation.

It is, perhaps, unavoidable that this powerful instability should arise as an artist attempts not to "transform" the everyday (which, in a way, is a simple task) but to share out its existence, almost to publicise the everyday, rather than perform some alchemical rite on it. It is misleading to suggest that Morris amplifies the everyday to grand proportions: such a strategy would be self-defeating, to some extent repeating the necessarily fruitless efforts of "reality" media products to reproduce everyday experience within the realm of television.<sup>5</sup>

What he performs, with some finesse, is to alert to the significance of aspects of the everyday without resort to inflation, to bumping up the scale, hyping the jeopardy, turning up the volume, or otherwise zooming in until we are assaulted by microscopic entities. *Itch*, a pre-enjoyed lottery ‘scratch’ card and its associated crumbs of metallic latex ink, all placed for observation under a magnifying glass, displays this tactic operating with precision and force, while at the same time remaining salutarily comic. Here we are encouraged to recalibrate gently our perception of events, to contemplate the great smallness that had been temporarily disguised by epic ambition, to fleetingly share the strange compulsion of mass-produced desire. And in this approach, Morris offers something undeniably satisfying: a resistance to the dominant order which refuses to tinker, refuses to try to disperse precarity with rhetoric.

Not that rhetoric is always absent, simply always escaping. One point of a trajectory is displayed in a glass case in *From Day One*. The piece features a discarded paper collar liner from the artist’s daughter’s new school uniform, discarded by the girl, but guarded by the artist for many months until a suitable method of displaying it, and the moment it represented in the life of the artist’s family, became apparent. The solution came when a fish tank-like apparatus turned up, and Morris had the notion of cutting a square of carpet from underneath where he first found the little scroll of cardboard. Here, quite literally, is a little square of home, a bit of the family house, complete with the detritus of a tiny and telling incident, transplanted to the gallery.

The beer bottles in another work, *Frozen export* are more obvious translations, forming a riposte to *Acid free* which was installed opposite in the exhibition *From Day One*. The artist has for some time harboured the feeling that there is a relationship between his enjoyment of beer and his stomach problems, and here we see the evidence of both what provokes and cures, staring each other out. Once more, the sequence of discarded “trash” packaging that is left over points to the days that have passed, the weeks, the months and – since we can see the effects of the seasons on the garden in which the beers bottles are photographed – the years that this little tango has been going on. Time, like a growing collection of empty beer bottles, somehow gets harder to ignore but easier to live with.

This notion (and indeed, process) of things, everyday things, recurring, accruing, stacking, beginning to add up, is Morris’ most trusted. And while that might almost be the description of the archetypical minimalist sculpture Morris’ work occasionally echoes, here the approach always comes to have a distinctly maximal emotional impact, telling not so much of the industrial process of its productions, but of the human ways of dividing time, or experiencing it, of noticing it, that can never quite be industrialised.

Luke Clancy

for the iconic Dansette record player, an immense hit at the birth of postwar consumer culture. BSR’s technology made it possible to ‘queue’ several vinyl records at a time, ready to be played, rather than having to place a new one on the turntable in order to hear it. With a stack of discs suspended on a central spindle, when one disc had played through, the tone arm would move clear while the next disc was ‘dropped’ onto the turntable (on top of the previously played disc), at which point the tone arm would move the stylus into place at the start of the new record, lowering it to begin playing the disc. The process could be repeated a number of times, offering an analogy of a present day ‘playlist’ – and an early instance of the consumer as producer, creating meanings through the selection and sequencing of records. The automatic changer is a technology that finds strong echoes in Morris’ work, such as in *Acid free* and *Frozen export*, where stacking up, stockpiling and the collateralisation of consumer experience are mobilising ideas. The Derry BSR factory closed in the 1970s, the company succumbing eventually to the rise of stereo, the compact cassette and finally, the Walkman.

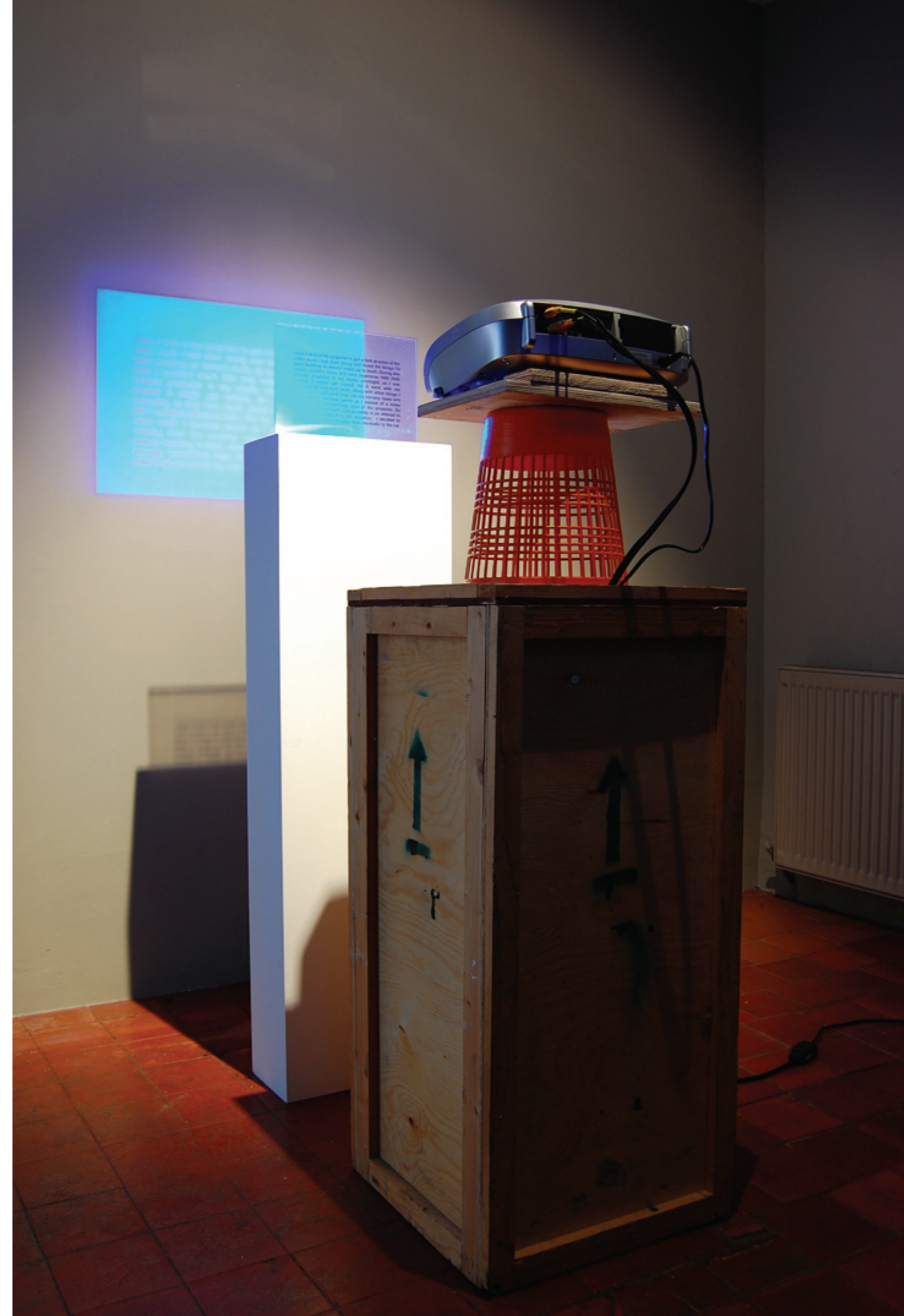
<sup>3</sup> By a further action of chance, the music on the disc was composed in the mid-1860s in the same period in which the church was built.

<sup>4</sup> It takes only a click or two for the encouraging, bright red web page of the Rennie product itself to blossom backwards into that of its parent company on the Bayer global site, hub of the pharma group’s three divisions, Bayer HealthCare, Bayer CropScience and Bayer MaterialScience. This, then, is the corporation the artist enlists to discipline his body, and the one whose patterning forces he tactically works within.

<sup>5</sup> Writing before the advent of Internet technologies and the read/write web, de Certeau suggests that TV provides no space for the viewer even to scrawl as a child might on its copybook, since “the television viewer cannot write anything on the screen of his set” and has been “dislodged from the product.” The emergence since of the possibility to “write back” via the computer screen, and the fantopia that it facilitates, served only to incorporate the viewer as the product, once more neutralising most potential for resistance, for creative consumption.

<sup>1</sup> Bolleter’s practice has involved travelling to remote destinations in search of instruments which have, over the years, developed a range of “timbral possibilities” through neglect. He then explores these possibilities in recordings made while he plays the instruments in situ, putting a highly specific type of detritus at the centre of his practice. See, or rather hear, *Nallan Void*, on *Austral Voices* (New Albion, 1990)

<sup>2</sup> The work in question was a public art piece celebrating the once central role of the Birmingham Sound Reproducers (BSR) factory in Derry life, but which chimes clearly with Morris’ wider preoccupations. Despite the nomenclature, the Birmingham company, at one time the world leader in automatic turntable technologies, was a major employer in Derry. For the present discussion, it is worth noting that the great success of BSR was in supplying the stacking device



**Off the shoulder number** Video projector, sign holder, text on overhead projection sheet, DVD  
Dimensions variable 4:40 minutes 2008