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# The Good, the Bad, the Indifferent

CONOR MARY FOY

'Adiaphora'

Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin

30 October (Live performance 7.15pm) – 2 November, 2013.



CONOR MARY FOY  
Top left: LIVE Performance, 30 October, 2013  
Remaining images: after the performance.

Press releases can turn you off, to the point that you reject the invitation to attend the art event. Niamh McCooey's poetic and generous introduction to Conor Mary Foy's art practice *via* the artist's reconstitution of the

term *adiaphora* (as conceptual underpinning to his short-lived performance-cum-three day exhibition at Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin), was a BIG turn on.<sup>1</sup>

Originating with the Greeks, *adiaphora* translates as 'indifferent things'. As a practiced philosophy *adiaphora* defined the moral grey area between what the Stoics deemed was the black/white polarities of virtue and vice: the Stoics weren't ones for ambiguities or trivialities. Christianity would put *adiaphora* to more practical use to find loop holes in moral-immoral church Law, in order to manufacture a blind eye so moral turpitude could reign free to realise economic posterity and other extra-Christian ambitions and desires. The term today could define our blasé attitude to human crises beyond ourselves. Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman defines contemporary *adiaphoric* "acts" as "those exempted by *social consent* (universal or local) from ethical evaluation, and therefore free from carrying the threat of pangs of conscience or moral stigma".<sup>2</sup> Bauman's "moral blindness" thesis is revealed explicitly today through social media and perpetuated by the sensational detachment offered by news media: HD doesn't sweat, bleed or smell.

Usually Chancery Lane's lone beacon on exhibition opening nights at this time of the year, Kevin Kavanagh Gallery looked all but closed on entering the street. Cursing artist and gallery alike, I soon ate my profanities when a collection of stiff heads – shaped by illumination no greater than candle light – came into view through the glass of the gallery door. The stiffness of the audience's heads was emphatic – like inverted exclamation marks. The type of stiffness you see at church, at a funeral, at a traffic accident, or, (usually) for performance art. It's a respectful stiffness, sometimes tinged with unthinking routine, oftentimes self-consciousness. The stiffness made sense when Foy's troop of performers came into view beyond the silhouetted spectators. Kitted out in opalescent masks that caught the colours of light like fish scales, the performers rotated ratchet mechanised instruments, made from boxwood and rubber band chords, that created a droning effect, like the sound of air rushing through Wavin pipe or a Jew's Harp. Although arms and hands were animated, the masks and face-forward postures of the troop portrayed indifference, becoming a game of chicken between performer and spectator. Acting as a centrepiece, one of the masked troop – tied or suppliant? – knelt below a timber-stilted hammock that was repeatedly poked by another troop member with a length of 2x1, triggering iridescent sand to sieve out onto the kneeling figure with every poke. After all the droning and poking was done (I know how it sounds...) the troop joined in a procession and exited like all good doctrinists (from Christians to Fascists) – in a regimental line. This was followed by obligatory applause and more droning – this time by the audience – caused by the lights being abruptly switched on.

It maybe a subjective generalisation but performance art invariably has a flatline trajectory, rolling out as a series of monotonous ebbs and flows that never reach a crescendo or rupture. However, as an oftentimes intuitive process, unrehearsed blemishes are a foregone but necessary conclusion, creating an uncomfortable standoff between performer and spectator. Unified by the dark and a synchronised activity, Foy's performers flatlined (without a blemish) throughout the 15 minutes duration of the performance. Was this my apathy coming through? The artist's? The performers'? The audience's?

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