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Ryan G. Van Cleave
Blue Man Group & the Shiftiness of *Wu Wei*

I'm trying to decide if they don't speak because no one can figure out
just what the hell blue fellows with banana-ooze spray-plugs
in their chest might have to talk about or whether it's a commentary
on the vatic moments of our lives, how 93.6% of the words we
speak

are hollow as the PVC pipe marimba they're jamming bad 80s tunes on.

My wife is starting to boogie under her plastic raincoat, jiving along
with little funky chicken hand moves, and most of the audience is, too,
really digging this blue trio, and I catch myself firing up the Who's
Your Daddy Arm Swing and Hip Shake, which really isn't about

the experience of fatherhood, but more along the lines
of "Daddy-o" or "Sugardaddy," where the paternal character of the word
gives way to pseudo-sexual Electra-complex overtones. Suddenly,
I'm struck with a zzzzzzzZZZZAAAPPP of existential angst as I realize
that the dancer both ASKS and ANSWERS the same question:
"Who's your Daddy? . . . I am your Daddy," and I can feel my chest
tightening, so I shut my eyes and hunker into my clear rainsuit as
the dingbat preschool-teacher-looking stranger woman next to me (prissy,
bad shoes, white daisy dress) says *Do you think they're blue ALL over?*

And now I'm thinking about clogged pores and acne scars, blue rubber
gloves that choke oxygen out of your skin, how there's three Blue
Man Group teams in Chicago and they're completely interchangeable
because as long as there's three idiots in blue facepaint and jumpsuits
on stage, they'll look enough like the guys in the Pentium III commercials
to please the crowd. And as the giant toilet paper streamers descend
upon us at the end of the show, I'm still stuck on the idea of answering/
asking, the oxymoronic quality of life, the very same beachglass-
in-the-soles-of-your-feet unignorability that steered me into philosophy

as an undergraduate, where I learned about *wu wei* and the *Tao Te
Ching* which mutually define each other, this the lesson from my

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philosophy of religion professor, Dr. Kissel, whose glass eye was the color of a chestnut while the other was, of course, Blue Man Group blue. Dr. Kissel once said *wu wei is both nothing and doing, it's action-not-action* and I remember thinking wow, zero-to-infinity in three words. One time in an elevator at Reavis Hall, home of the philosophy, sociology, American studies, economics, linguistics, and ethnic literature folks, Dr. Kissel, alone

in the elevator with me, punched the STOP button. Cheesy bells went off and he gave me a Chesire grin, leaned close, and said *I'll tell you what philosophy is, it's a hypodermic of sea monkeys right in your skull.*

A short time later, I was an English major, where I thought of myself in *wu wei* terms, both as “valiant warrior” and “helpless victim.”

A few weeks later, during an Internet investigation into Shakespeare's Use of the Semicolon as Repressed Adulterous Guilt,

I typed *wu wei* into a search engine and found www.wuweicom.com, which gave me this message “I'm toast and I am not functioning anymore.

I'm frozen and I can't move. I love all of you.” When Blue Man Group's neon glow-in-the-dark skeleton band kicks into the exit number, a rock-n-roll heavy-bass riff that has the red Briar Theater seats beneath us shaking, I follow my wife out in a surge of bodies past the tube-choked walls of the entryway and then into the chill Chicago evening, where starlight has just began to burst to life upon a blue evening sky. My wife grabs my hand, says, *Well, what'cha think about the show? Did you like it?* I think of silly Twinkie skits and ho-hum 80s ripoffs as well as how her folks dropped fifty bucks a ticket;

I feel the downward yank of gravity in my gut increasing as I quickly say *Yes-not-yes*, and my wife, no Taoist guru, knows exactly what I mean.