

MAGGIE NELSON

BLUETS

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what form, exactly, “fallen-out” blues will take. I imagine it will be a sort of muddle.

166. The 1939 film *The Women* was shot entirely in black and white, with the exception of one Technicolor sequence—a fashion show—which was literally detachable from the rest of the film. This colored reel had no bearing on the plot whatsoever, so the projectionist could choose to insert it as part of the movie or ignore it altogether. Could one imagine a book that functioned similarly, albeit in reverse—a kind of optional, black-and-white appendage to a larger body of blue (e.g., “the blue planet”)?

167. I don’t go to the movies anymore. Please don’t try to convince me. When something ceases to bring you pleasure, you cannot *talk* the pleasure back into it. “My removal arose not out of a conscious decision, but was simply a natural fading away from film,” writes artist Mike Kelley. “We have become filmic language, and when we look at the screen all we see is ourselves. So what is there to fall into or be consumed by? When looking at something that purports to be you, all you can do is comment

on whether you feel it is a good resemblance or not. Is it a flattering portrait? This is a conscious, clearly ego-directed, activity.” I find myself in agreement with him on all counts. Perhaps this is why I have turned my gaze so insistently to blue: it does not purport to be me, or anyone else for that matter. “I think both the theater and we ourselves have had enough of psychology” (Artaud).

168. Cézanne, too, had had enough of psychology. He attended, instead, to color. “If I paint all the little blues and all the little browns, I capture and convey his glance,” he said of painting a man’s face. This may be but a colorized restatement of Wittgenstein’s remark, “if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be—unutterably—*contained* in what has been uttered!” Perhaps this is why I take the blues of Cézanne so seriously.

169. Despite his falling away from film, Kelley remains charmed by Joseph Cornell’s 1936 film *Rose Hobart*, a collage of found footage of a jungle B-movie called *East of Borneo*. Using scissors and tape, Cornell cut *East of*

Borneo down from 77 minutes to 19¹/₂, focusing fairly exclusively on shots of Rose Hobart, the movie's spunky female lead. Cornell's instructions for the film state that it should be screened with a soundtrack of Latin dance music, and that it should be projected through a deep blue filter, so as to bathe Rose in the color he so loved.

170. Cornell even coined a word to describe the sensation he hoped to produce by blue-tinting his work: "Blue-aille." I have no idea how he pronounced it, which is fine by me—this way it can be "bluet" (like the flower), "blue-ail" (like an affliction), or "blue-aye" (like Versailles, or blue-eye). Unlike Yves Klein, however, Cornell had no urge to patent his invention (which is just as well, as you can't yet patent a sensation, thank God). Cornell was a gatherer, not an owner. He was also a builder of bowers, which he called "habitats," as befits someone who adored birds. "Day / and I gathered fragments of blue dense," he wrote in an undated scribble.

171. When one begins to gather "fragments of blue dense," one might think one is paying tribute to the blue

wholes from which they came. But a bouquet is no homage to the bush. Over the years I have amassed countless blue stones, blue shards of glass, blue marbles, trampled blue photographs peeled off sidewalks, pieces of blue rubble from broken buildings, and though I can't remember where most of them came from, I love them nonetheless.

172. To stumble upon discarded canisters of a bad Hollywood movie, to cut the reels up in an effort to isolate the thing you love to gaze upon most, to project the resulting patchwork through the lens of your favorite color, alongside a bustling "tropical" soundtrack: this seems to me, right now, the perfect film. But there is one other important candidate: Warhol's *Blue Movie*, otherwise known as *Fuck*. "I'd always wanted to do a movie that was pure fucking, nothing else," Warhol said, and in October of 1968, he did.

173. In July of 1969, *Blue Movie* was seized by the police for obscenity, and was then not screened publicly for years. When the obscenity issue faded away, one of its

fuckers, Viva, suppressed the film on the grounds that she'd never signed a release for it. By 2005, Viva had apparently changed her mind, and she appeared with the film at several festivals. But as I saw neither it nor her, it would be unjust to say any more on the subject.

174. Mallarmé might have felt otherwise. For Mallarmé, the perfect book was one whose pages have never been cut, their mystery forever preserved, like a bird's folded wing, or a fan never opened.

175. Viva to Louis Waldon, the other fucker in *Blue Movie*:

"We don't want to see your ugly cock and balls . . .
It should be hidden."

Louis: "You can't see it."

Viva: "Well, it should be hidden."

176. This idea has its charms, but I think it possible that I have watched too many blue movies for it to have a lasting hold on me. If you grow accustomed to wall-to-wall, even the slightest shred of mystery or plot can become an agitation. Who cares why these people have found them-

selves in this banal, suburban track home in Burbank? He is not a delivery man; she is not a bored housewife. They are not the stars—their orifices are. Let them open.

177. Perhaps it is becoming clearer why I felt no romance when you told me that you carried my last letter with you, everywhere you went, for months on end, unopened. This may have served some purpose for you, but whatever it was, surely it bore little resemblance to mine. I never aimed to give you a talisman, an empty vessel to flood with whatever longing, dread, or sorrow happened to be the day's mood. I wrote it because I had something to say to you.

178. Neither Cornell nor Warhol made the mistake of thinking that all desire is yearning. For Warhol, fucking was less about desire than it was about killing time: it is take-it-or-leave-it work, accomplished similarly by geniuses and retards, just like everything else at the Factory. For Cornell, desire was a sharpness, a tear in the static of everyday life—in his diaries he calls it "the spark," "the lift," or "the zest." It delivers not an ache, but a sudden