The postulate of the story requires faith, the faith of childhood. I mean that one must believe implicitly at the very
beginning and not question the possibility that the mere picking of a rose might lead a family into adventure, or that a man can be changed into a beast, and vice versa. Such enigmas offend grown-ups who are really prejudiced, proud of their doubt, armed with derision. But I have the impudence to believe that the cinema which depicts the impossible is apt to carry conviction, in a way, and may be able to put a “singular” occurrence into the plural.

It is up to us (that is, to me and my unit—in fact, one entity) to avoid those impossibilities which are even more of a jolt in the midst of the improbable than in the midst of reality. For fantasy has its own laws which are like those of perspective. You may not bring what is distant into the foreground, or render fuzzily what is near. The vanishing lines are impeccable and the orchestration so delicate that the slightest false note jars. I am not speaking of what I have achieved, but of what I shall attempt within the means at my disposal.

My method is simple: not to aim at poetry. That must come of its own accord. The mere whispered mention of its name frightens it away. I shall try to build a table. It will be up to you then to eat at it, to examine it or to chop it up for firewood.

I’m finding it very difficult to make the artists understand that the style of the film needs a luster and a lack of naturalness that are supernatural. There is not much dialogue. They cannot permit the least fuzziness.

I am not a real director and probably never shall be. I get too interested in what is happening.

This film must prove that it’s possible to avoid camera movement and keep to a fixed frame.

With this postponement I have come to realize that the rhythm of the film is one of narrative. I am telling the story. It is as if I were hidden behind the screen, saying: “Then such and such a thing happened.” The characters don’t seem to be living a life of their own, but a life that is being narrated. Perhaps that’s how it should be in a fairy tale.

I told Alekan off after the run-through. His mania for plotting his shots, yet at the same time making them appear diffuse, revolts me. It’s all too “artistic”. Nothing is equal to the sublimation of the documentary style. It is this style I want from him.

People have decided once and for all that fuzziness is poetic. Now, since in my eyes poetry is precision, number, I’m pushing Alekan in precisely the opposite direction from what fools think is poetic. He is slightly bewildered.

M. asked Paul: “Why is Jean making a film? They don’t last.” An amazing statement, As if anything at all was lasting, beginning with the work!

& if you want to go webtripping this week—

Cocteau began this project with a story by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780), ”Le Magasin des enfants” (1756). There’s a good web site on her with a link to the story in French and a few good stills from the film: www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/gallica/Chronologie/18siede/Leprince/lepr_intr.html. You’ll find info on Cocteau’s films at www.scf.usc.edu/~pkon/Cocteau.html. For an excellent web site on Cocteau in French go to www.multimania.com/ericd/Mylene/Beyond2/JeanCocteau/CoctBio.html. And for a good bio note and listing of his works in English visit www.kirjasto.sci.fi/cocteau.htm.

—to receive the Angelika Film Center’s weekly film summaries and screening times, send an email to ldamelio@compuserve.com with your email address.....for cast and crew info on almost any film: imdb.com/search.html or allmovie.com.....for information on major American films, including detailed plot summaries: www.filmsite.org.....email Bruce Jackson: bjackson@buffalo.edu.....email Diane Christian: engde@acsu.buffalo.edu.....for the series schedule, links and updates: www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~bjackson/movies.html...to get on the listserv for the class send an email to listserv@listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu with this line & nothing else as the message: sub greatmovies-list Firstname Lastname

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