

Maurice: The difference between erotic film and pornographic film is penetration. Here, everything is proposed, nothing is imposed.

Lisa Rønner: How many people have come today?

Maurice: You have to watch your language. You are in an erotic cinema, you know. Today, we had 80 people.

Lisa: That's a lot?

Maurice: No, that's nothing.

Lisa: How many usually come?

Maurice: 100. It used to be more like 180.

Lisa: The cinema is 18 and over. Costs 12 euros to get in. Clearly indicated on the door: "All exits are final". Inside, a small stage on which is mounted a screen. 80 red leather seats. A bathroom in the front left corner. Gumn trails. What first brought you here?

Maurice: The cinema did. I had never even seen a porn film before I first started working here in the early 1970s. I was a projectionist and had been for the past twenty years. I had just moved to Paris, I was looking for a job in a cinema. I had been working here for ten years when my boss decided to retire. Facing unemployment, I decided to buy the business. I thought I'd be here for three months. It's been 25 years.

Lisa: What do you do as owner of a small cinema?

Maurice: I open and close up. I'm the projectionist, the cashier, the cleaning lady and sometimes, although rarely, I get to play the bouncer.

Lisa: Why have all erotic cinemas closed down in Paris? Where have they all gone?

Maurice: It's simple. In France, while violence isn't taxed, pleasure is.

Lisa: The impact of May 1968 was that cinemas started screening erotic and pornographic films. What happened next?

Maurice: In 1974 a new law came into effect. Films with sexual content had to be played in specialised cinemas. That's when a lot of the smaller cinemas like this one started to screen x films exclusively.

Lisa: The Beverly was once called Bikini. I read it used to show Westerns and B-movies.

Maurice: Yes, the cinema was called the Bikini in the 1960s.

Lisa: It was baptised the Beverly in 1970? And started showing pornographic films, exclusively, in 1972?

Maurice: What happened was that the film distributors would send the smaller cinemas the commercial films six months after the film had already played in the larger theatres. Before the small cinemas would get to show it, it would have already aired on television.

Lisa: Video prices have dropped significantly. That democratisation must have had a huge effect on business. Often it's cheaper to buy a DVD than it is to see a film in the theatres. And the selection just keeps getting larger and larger.

Maurice: A lot of small cinemas have since closed down, they just couldn't compete with the video market. Tickets are expensive. But that's because taxes are.

Lisa: You are the last cinema to show 35 mm x-rated films in Paris. How many 35 mm films do you own?

Maurice: We have about two hundred 35 mm pictures. These copies are 25 years old and in very bad shape. So we don't play them everyday. We play them every other day. After taxes there's not much left over for investing in new material.

Lisa: What are your favourite films, Maurice?

Maurice: I love all of Brigitte Lahaie's films. Old films, with beautiful cars, ones that take place in châteaux, with actors that don't take themselves seriously. Porn films don't leave much room for the imagination because they show everything. That's why I find erotic films like *Belle de jour* so exciting. I mean, we'd all like to see Catherine Deneuve fuck. I love François Truffaut, Claude Lelouch, Godard. I love all good films.

Lisa: Would you play *Belle de jour* here?

Maurice: I couldn't afford a copy. It would cost too much to legally screen it and you know my clients, they all come here with their eyes closed. They don't come here to watch a film for an hour and half. They come in and out. They want results, fast.

[Journalist's note] "They come here with eyes wide shut," says the young man who's currently making a documentary about Maurice. "With that title, Stanley Kubrick is of course referring to the pornographic spectator. He is describing how people watch porn films."

Lisa: What is erotic?

Maurice: Eroticism is the cinema one makes up in one's head. Eroticism can be found at every corner. Just one look can make you feel like you have just had sex

with that person. Rodin's sculptures are erotic. At the Rodin museum, I once overheard a woman say to another woman, about Rodin, "He must have fucked like a gorilla." Erotic is something that excites.

Lisa: The French theoretician of eroticism, Georges Bataille, argued that eroticism performs a function of dissolving boundaries. Can you tell me about what happens on Thursdays and Saturdays, at your *soirée erotica*?

[Journalist's note] Maurice hosts erotic theatre on Thursdays and Saturdays at 11 pm. Couples only. He invites me to watch a film he made of one of those nights. The cinema has a stage; behind the screen, there's a faux chimney, faux brick walls, feathers, masks, and very strange erotic art on the wall. In his film, filmed with two cameras, women are on stage wearing feathered masks and black robes. Beneath the dark caps, c-strings. One of the women is wearing leather hot pants. I wonder if I am sitting in come. (Lisa, what does "sitting in come" mean?) We are talking as the film is playing.

Maurice: We staged *Eyes Wide Shut*. We decided to imagine what happens after the party scene.

Lisa: Who are the participants?

Maurice: Exhibitionists and voyeurs. People don't come here to have sex. They come here to have fun, to express liberty.

Lisa: You have created a place where people can physically act out their fantasies. In the film, the women are now eating each other out.

Maurice: The goal is to make people participate. Fantasies come out of the screen to be realised in the flesh. People recite erotic poems, women dance on stage, others strip tease. It's a very libertine atmosphere. Funnily, we almost never talk about sex.

Lisa: What do you talk about?

Maurice: We often talk about cooking, we share recipes...

Lisa: Has the clientele changed much since you took over the cinema?

Maurice: It's constantly renewing itself.

Lisa: Kids are constantly turning 18.

Maurice: Yes, and then there are those who disappear into old age, retirement homes.

Lisa: Has the current economic crisis affected your business? Do you have more business?

Maurice: When people have to choose between food and cinema, most people will choose food, so yes and no.

Lisa: How do you imagine the cinema's future?

Maurice: I definitely don't see my future in a crystal ball but rather in a bocce ball. Who knows, it could become a traditional cinema, or perhaps even a cinema for children. After *les seins animés* (the living breasts) come *les dessins animés* (cartoons). I've had several theatre people come by, expressing interest but in no way am I ready to retire.

Lisa: I've always been so work-shy, sometimes I spend entire days pretending I am retired.

Maurice: Mademoiselle, I go on stage, I take a woman's clothes off, I caress her and she says to me "thank you", and her husband applauds me with a standing ovation even though I've just been feeling his wife's breasts. What stories will I have to tell my friends once I retire? I'm giving myself white hair, but I like it here.

Lisa: I live for stories...

Maurice: The only thing I regret is not having come here earlier. I caught a glimpse of the Belle Époque, when you'd have a huge turn around, people going in and out constantly, lots of couples. Men at that time were courteous, and distinguished. When couples came in, they were excited, but also very respectful.

Lisa: Do you show gay films?

Maurice: No, I don't. Back rooms are hard to keep under control. All I have to worry about here, these days, is whether someone is smoking in the theatre.

Lisa: What has the Internet changed?

Maurice: Being in front of a computer screen will never be the same as walking into a dark black room, where there are people around you, all moving in their seats...

Lisa: I can imagine one feels less alone in those circumstances.

Maurice: Quickly in the cinema you begin to imagine things, especially with the sound of people moving around in their seats. It's an erotic moment. Where everything is suggested and nothing is imposed.

Lisa: Yes, that's exactly it. Eroticism is not about proceeding to satisfaction by the most direct route possible, but about finding means of making the satisfaction greater and even transcendental when it is attained.

The cinema is dedicated to Alain Paillet, also known as John Love, Maurice's favourite porn director, who died in December 2007.