

The Love Machine

feature, USA, 82 minutes, 2000 presskit v5



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synopsis

<http://www.The-Love-Machine.com> is the address of an "adult" web site set up on a New York City university web server as a prank by a student, "Marcus B." Becca Campbell is the self styled investigative reporter who is attempting to make an expose of "sexual fantasy on the internet" by delving into the private lives of some of the local users of the site without their knowledge. Some of the people Becca meets include:

Akira, a Japanese student with an American boyfriend, Javier, and a Japanese girlfriend, Kyoko;

Beverly, a woman in her forties who keeps a web journal of her affair with two teenage boys;

Shino and *Mike*, "amateur exhibitionists" who are contemplating a menage a trois arranged entirely by email;

Julio, a bookish college professor with a macho-lover alter ego;

and *Chip*, a gay man searching for the absolutely perfect soul mate on the Internet.

A subject perfect for a sleazy talk show turns into something much more substantial as the richly characterized participants become aware of the filmmaker's purpose and manage to subvert the experience with a surprising dignity and humor.

The Love Machine may be a satire of the stop-at-nothing American media, but also is a wonderful snapshot of a variety of New York subcultures. Structured as a sly homage to the classic French New Wave film "Chronicle of a Summer" (in which filmmaker Jean Rouch stopped people on the streets of Paris and convinced them to talk about their private lives), *The Love Machine* is an intimate portrait of New Yorkers and of their constant search for companionship.

press quotes

A VICIOUS, HILARIOUS MASTERPIECE! - San Francisco Weekly

NASTY! A well acted, titillating, malicious satire of 'sex, lies, and cyberspace.' - New York Times

THE LOVE MACHINE WILL MAKE YOU LAUGH ! A cleverly executed and often very funny "internet caper."- The Daily News



FUNNY and PROVOCATIVE! A virtual saloon where sexual adventurers can meet. - TimeOut

GREAT FUN! A wonderfully drawn and truly nasty piece of work that had the jaded, post-therapy Los Angeles audience audibly gasping. - The Independent

HILARIOUSLY CANDID!
- The Chicago Reader

EXTRAORDINARY. Lends new meaning to 'sex, lies, and videotape!'
- The Philadelphia Inquirer

A MUST SEE! - The Bay Area Reporter

WONDERFUL TRICKERY, fabulous performances, expertly crafted!
- Cashiers du Cinemart

A DELICIOUSLY PERVERSE CHRONICLE of love in the time of the Internet. -Le Devoir (Montreal)

A DELIGHTFULLY WICKED SATIRE! -The Gazette (Montreal)

A FASCINATING GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK WITH REALITY. -Voir

article: the village voice

production feature - june 1999

INDECENT EXPOSURE: THE REAL INTERNET, CAPTURED IN 16MM

by Amy Taubin

Shot in grubby, low-tech 16mm, Gordon Eriksen's *The Love Machine* is a fiction film about the Internet, set during what history will deem its primitive phase—the finale of the '90s. As in the initial stages of all visual and linguistic media, users are driven by unsublimated fantasies. Pornography is the course of least resistance.

The Love Machine depicts a group of mostly twentysomethings who use a university network to create a Web site (*The Love Machine*) where their secret sexual identities run as wild as their middle-class inhibitions permit. Among the characters are a closeted gay Japanese student and a professor who posts nude photos of a student he seduces. Eriksen's no-budget movie premiered last month at the L.A. Independent Film Festival, where its unsettling combination of nonglitzy, utilitarian filmmaking, techno-hip subject matter, and humanist progressive politics provoked heated discussions, much laughter, and a generally enthusiastic response. ("A brilliant satire of sexual fantasies on the Internet," opined indieWIRE.)

Eriksen, whose three previous films (*The Big Dis*, *Scenes From the New World*, and *Lena's Dreams*) were made in collaboration with his wife, Heather Johnston, has been committed to populist, no-budget filmmaking since he and Johnston graduated from Harvard a decade ago. Their films have a direct connection to their daily lives. *The Big Dis* was about interracial friendships in the Long Island neighborhood where they grew up. *Lena's Dreams* used the actor's life as a metaphor for their own conflicted feelings about continuing to make indie films. Eriksen went solo on *The Love Machine* because Johnston became pregnant shortly before pro-

duction (their daughter, Erika Johnston, is nearly one year old) and because the subject didn't interest her as much as it did him.

For the last two years—during the making of *The Love Machine*—Eriksen has been earning a living as a computer consultant. "I'm a Grade B computer wonk," he says. "I spend about eight hours a day online for my job." It got him thinking about the difference between how the Internet is covered by the media and what most people's everyday experience of the Internet is. Out of that contradiction came *The Love Machine*, in which a decidedly unsympathetic documentary filmmaker callously exposes the real identities of a bunch of *Love Machine* users.

"Most of the media that covers the Internet have broadband connections and all the latest tools. They have a more pleasant experience than the average person, who has a medium to slow modem and who, when not surfing for porno, uses e-mail and chat rooms. And I think what intrigues most people is that sense of community with people they'd never meet otherwise. But the media doesn't write about the national character as filtered through the Internet, or about what's on people's minds. They write about commerce and big-deal technology-stuff that's only interesting to about a half a million IS professionals. So in *The Love Machine*, I have the documentary director jump on this subject because it's so hyped by the media, and then discover that it's nothing like what she expected."

For Eriksen, the problem with the Internet is that it was co-opted by big business right from the beginning ("No one's offering content that's compelling enough to make me put up with the ads") and that it's being treated largely as a medium of convergence—a new path for TV and movies. "That may be true in the future, but right now, it's not a good medium for video delivery.



But because everyone's pouring money into that aspect of it, all the special uses of the Internet are pushed aside. So I decided to make a film about the unique way people use the Internet to live out their fantasies and interact with other people in the guise of invented characters."

Eriksen doesn't think audiences will sneer at the old-fashioned, 16mm look of the film. "The people who read *Wired* will probably be bored by the level of technology represented. But most of the people who use the Internet have crudely pasted-up home pages. Technology-wise, they're on the same level as the film. And all the Web [pages] are based on the real Web sites of people I know, like these Japanese students for whom the East Village is like Paris. They were the original inspiration for the film."

And why does Eriksen believe that these Internet obsessives will be interested in going out to a movie? "The Internet is boring. Who wants to just sit in front of a computer screen? Movies are like theater. You watch them with a community of people. They're larger-than-life dreamscapes. There's nothing better than a good movie."

Tangled Web

Cyberspace's impostors get exposed

by Lawrence Ferber



People surfing the internet often suffer from Clark Kent/Superman syndrome. For instance, that uninhibited, 20-year-old gay sexpot you're chatting with online may actually be a mild mannered, middle aged, closeted librarian when he's away from his PC. Chat rooms, sex sites, and newsgroups allow people not only to slip into another person's skin, but also to take off their own. The-Love-Machine.com, the sordid sex site at the center of the film *The Love Machine*, allows its anonymous members to be who they really are, from love-starved gay romantic to no-holds-barred Don Juan.

Journalistic juggernaut Becca Campbell (Marlene Forte), a self-styled investigative reporter, has designated five members of the site -- all unaware she knows their online truths -- as her newest documentary subjects.

There's Akira (Jun Suenage), a closet queen who's engaged to Kyoko, but posts photos of himself with clandestine boyfriend Javier. Then there's Beverly (Elizabeth Wunsch), a 40-ish

woman who documents her lurid affair with a pair of teenagers, Tom and Jerry. Shino (Tomo Omori), a liberated exhibitionist, and her reserved boyfriend Mike (Will Keenan) post naughty photos, and solicit a threesome. Julio (Gary Perez), a conservative and married college professor, beds all the collegiate women he can lure. And finally there's Chip (Chip Garner), a giggly gay man looking for love.

After getting to know her subjects, morally questionable Campbell faces them with their respective sites (and a plethora of self-righteousness), resulting in mayhem: shouting matches, threatened lawsuits, laughs, tears, and even fisticuffs.

Shot in a hodgepodge of film stocks, writer/director Gordon Eriksen's venomously funny mockumentary (yes, it's all fiction) is a resounding success, packed with extremely naturalistic actors and often hysterical situations as Campbell antagonizes her lot once the cat's out of the bag.

Yet while *The Love Machine* is a clever conceit, one must question why half these folks posted their secret photos on the Net at all. Incriminating photos have an odd way of turning up, as many actors and politicians will attest. Still, *The Love Machine* is an indisputable, guilty pleasure that more than triumphs this logical flaw. Log on.

interview with the director

by **Luciana Moherdau** of **ig**
(Brazil's top entertainment site)

October 2000

How did you have the idea to do the film?

I was pursuing the idea of doing a documentary about friends who were members of the sizable Japanese expatriate artists community living in NYC. In doing research, I discovered that there were many sites about NYC in Japanese aimed at "friends back home", and began thinking of using one as a central structural element. This in turn led me to a real character much like "Shino" and thus into the netherworld of amateur porn sites...and this was a much more interesting subject! As I met a few amateur cyber-pornographers, what struck me was how strikingly different people's sites were from who they appeared to be in their daily lives...and revealing that dichotomy became the focus of the film.



Did you make some study about sex online? Do the people really separate the personal life of the public?

Yes, I did - and I do think that, to paraphrase what Shino says in the film, the cyber world is fantasy come alive, but not truly "real" in people's minds (at least, not yet). People try out new identities online, and the results change who they are in the real world...but I think most people see their offline lives as the "real" ones, and the online world as experimental, a dream.

Do you have any idea about the universe that practices virtual sex? What you think about on-line sex?

Online sex - meaning solo, mutual, or group masturbation in response to live video feeds, pictures, chat, and text - hmmm. I think it's pretty interesting, because it allows sexual experimentation without personal contact or risk...and sexual experimentation is a good thing.

On the other hand, I think it is easier to get addicted to virtual sex than other forms of non-personal eroticism (say, video) because it is more responsive and customized to one's desires...and that is bad. Too much of a good thing isn't so good. Virtual sex comes without emotional commitment of any kind, really, and if that's all the sex you ever get that's too bad. I mean, ONLY hiding in your home playing with yourself instead of finding someone attractive to do it with (and, yes, putting up with the resulting emotional entanglements) is pretty lazy.

Hopefully virtual sex can ultimately enhance real world sex lives.

In your film, you show a reporter that invades the people's privacy and, practically, she forces them to reveal their on-line sexual lives. What do you think about this?

Well, I think she is a monster...but just a minor representative of the monstrous media machine that we all feed and suffer from daily. The fact is, there are large audiences for exploitative journalism like she is practicing - what differentiates Becca is that she is not experienced enough to hide her manipulations. In assembling the film, she egotistically thought keeping herself on screen was interesting (and it is) but it also revealed just how badly she behaved, so audiences lose faith in her. In fact many become angry and want to yell at her when the lights come up...but very few have ever walked out in protest, because they want to know what happens to the characters, and some of their anger comes from guilty feelings about having been a ticket-buying party to the exploitation.

Happily, the story ends well for most of them, so there is no riot in the theater like there would be if all went badly.

What I like is, by the end of the film, even the most conservative, uptight viewers tend to sympathize with these characters (who they thought were "liars" and "perverts" at the beginning) because they are mistreated by someone in a position of authority. Everyone is an individualist anti-authoritarian radical somewhere deep down inside...

The internet has that characteristic of being free, without borders and lawless. Which is his opinion on that? Is it possible, then, does to live a parallel life and to sell the body and to take a normal life, like you describe in your film?

Well, I like the freedom of the internet a great deal, and think that is one of the few potential tools for significant social change left in the world. Most money on the planet is in the hand of a few people, and most of the media is controlled by big, multinational businesses that don't necessarily have the best intentions towards humanity (except as paying consumers of content). The Internet, however, is not controlled, and nor will it be - its uncontrollable.

I don't think it will be so possible to live a double life, however...as the Internet becomes more pervasive and more a constant part of peoples lives (probably through wireless TCP/IP devices) it will be integrated into "reality" and will not offer the fantasy component as successfully as it does now.

Hence the computer is such an important part of these people sexuality, can we call them cyborgs?

Ahh, but the PC is a passing phase, like Victorian period underwear or something. The PC is just another fetish object that will quickly be replaced by something else. I think PCs have hit their high water mark, and we are onto

PDAs, cellphones, and mail/videoconferencing tablets.

Do you think virtual sex with masturbation is, somehow, more exciting than just arousing the partner in person?

Well - if its more novel, more experimental, more forbidden or secret - which it tends to be at this point - then it tends to be more exciting. But don't underestimate personal contact!

Will teledildonics evolve, or will it always be a dead end?

I don't know...I think if they come up with sex dolls that can be inhabited virtually and cost less than \$250, they will sell a lot of them. Its all a matter of how cheap virtual reality tools for other business applications become, and then can be repurposed for sexual ends.

Cybersex nowadays is narrowband, mostly text-based. Do you think broadband will somehow change it? what about virtual reality?

Yeah, broadband will start to carry more live home video, so people's kinky play will get more involved. And strangers will have more to offer each other, more quickly, so more encounters will occur. As for virtual reality, see my previous answer.

I love to consider these questions, but don't have short answers: For those in a monogamous relationship, is sex with a robot cheating? Is sex with a robot controlled remotely by another person cheating? What if the robot looks human? What if it doesn't?

Webcams: do you think they add to the experience or do they bust the magic of the persona?

As they stand now, they are pretty brutally real and take you out of fantasyland, replacing the fantasy experience with a grainy, voyeuristic picture like a surveillance camera (at least after a few uses, once you tire of the surveillance camera fantasy)...but I think as they improve people may make more sophisticated use of them, with sets and costumes.

Do you think that on-line gender-change has any reflection on the real world?

Like I said, I think people play out fantasies online, and it gently affects their real world selves, how they think, how they identify and communicate with other people...but perhaps not so literally as you may be implying. People try out different gender roles for many reasons...perhaps some truly wish they were another sex..but other people, armed with a new understanding of what it feels to be gay or straight, male or female (or in between) go out into the world and are able to move in the the circles of each other's desire more easily...at least that is my hope.

The cast

Becca	Marlene Forte
Julio	Gary Perez
Shino	Tomo Omori
Akira	Jun Suenaga
Beverly	Elizabeth Wunsch
Chip	Chip Garner
Marcus	John Chidiac
Axel	Randolph Graff
Cecilia	Mariana Carreno
Mike	Will Keenan
Kyoko	Kayoko Takahashi
Javier	Al Rodriguez
Serena	Monica Hamburg
Becca's Cook	David Chan
Takashi	Tsuyoshi Kondo
Yoshi	Yoshifumi Nakamori
Young Student	Giselle Rodriguez
"Helena"	Diana Delacruz
"Gigi"	Kaiese Johnson
"Jessica"	Denise Gottwald
Students in photos	Victoria Hong Yesenia Martinez Catherine Morales Carveth Martin
Chip's Catch	Takayuki Tsunekawa

credits

Crystal Pictures Presents an Olympia Pictures Production
The Love Machine A Study of Sexual Fantasy on the Internet
A Film By Becca Campbell
Written & Directed by Gordon Eriksen

Executive Producers	Louis Robles & Ruth Robles
Producer	Steven G. Menkin
Associate Producers	Ivan Saperstien, Chip Garner, Diana Williams
Camera	Hiro Wakiya
Sound	Noah V. Timan
Editor	Michael J. Dominico
Assistant Camera	Ramone Britt
Still Photographs	Randolf Graff
Bolex & Add'l Stills	Gordon Eriksen
Additional Sound	Jacque Durand
Music Supervisor	Mike Dominico
Web Site Design	John Chidiac Andy Goldberger
Art Direction	Carveth Martin
Audio Post Services	Spin Cycle Post
Sound Editor & Mix	Stephen Altobello
Key P.A.	Ritchie Wislocky
Set P.A.s	Victoria Hong Larry Strong
Editing Assistants	Mayu Nakamura Changgeon Keum Rebecca Neff
Camera Guru	David Hausen
Negative Matching	Dick Cohen
Titles	Sal Mallimo
Insurance	Near North
Motion Picture Lab	Color Lab
Color Timer	Chris Hughes
Stills Lab	U.S. Color

Thanks:	
Everything	Heather & Erika
Splicer	Michael Callahan
Steenbecks	Nathaniel Lackenmeyer Bernie Hayden
Lights & CP16	Edwin Figueroa
Rewinds	Amy T
Bolex	Chip Garner
Projection	Michael Young
SR2 & Tripod	David Hausen
Agfa Film	Kazu Kuken
Photo Studio	Eric Ceret
Short Ends	Larry Strong Mike Dominico
Fax Machine	Sue Bodine
Color Meter	Armando Basulto
LCII Computer	Greg Mottola
Darkroom	Karen Keats
Sushi	Esashi Restaurant
Leader & Tape	Mayu Nakamara
Casting Help	Masa Sakamaki Masa Yoshikawa
Support	Steve Hamilton Cara DiMassimo Jim McKay
Ideas	Kyoko Hirano Shinji Ishioka Jean Rouch

about the director & producers

Gordon Eriksen (Writer & Director) completed *The Big Dis*, his first, low-budget indie feature, at the age of 22. *The Big Dis*, a seminal “amerindie” in Sundance ‘89, became a festival and art house hit in 1990 when distributed by First Run Features. With his partner, Heather Johnston, he has made two other features, *Scenes from the New World* (‘94), and *Lena’s Dreams* (‘97) which is currently being distributed by The Cinema Guild. These features have played almost fifty international film festivals, including Sundance, Berlin, Toronto, and San Sebastian, and have won half a dozen directing and acting awards. With Ms. Johnston, Gordon has been chosen as one of ten independent filmmakers to watch by MovieLine magazine, has been the subject of profiles in the New York Times, Newsday, and The Village Voice, and is the recipient of grants from The Ford Foundation, The NEA, and NYSCA, among others.

Steve Menkin (Producer) began his entertainment career in 1969 when he was cast to star in the lead role of the Broadway musical *Hair*. After a decade in the Broadway theater, which included lead roles in *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, he began producing off Broadway shows such as Terry McNalley’s *Things that Go Bump in the Night*. From there he began a successful career in movies and television, producing HBO Comedy Specials *Comedy’s Dirtiest Dozen* and *Heavyweights of Comedy* and features such as Warner Brothers’ *Only The Strong*, 20th Century Fox’ *Mondo New York*, and Disney’s *The Party*.

Louis Robles & Ruth Robles (Exec. Producers) and their company Crystal Pictures have partnered with Good Machine (*Crouching Tiger*) to executive produce *Love God*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and *The Sticky Fingers of Time*, which premiered at the Venice, Berlin and Toronto Film Festivals. Crystal Pictures has also produced *The True History of Chocolate*, *The History of Money*, and *Tribal Journeys* documentaries.

Diana Williams (Assoc. Producer) recently produced Jim McKay’s *Our Song*, for which she was nominated for a 2001 Independent Spirit Award. She also recently co-produced *Nice Guys Sleep Alone*, based on the book by Bruce Fierstein and directed by Stu Pollard. A graduate of the Director’s Guild of America’s training program, she has worked as an assistant director on the *Larry Sanders Show* as well as numerous studio pictures including *Drop Zone*, *Clueless*, *Dante’s Peak* and *My Fellow Americans*.

about the cast

Marlene Forte (Becca) appears on the CBS sitcom *My Wife & Kids*. She also starred in *Lena's Dreams*.

Chip Garner (Chip) a former associate producer for ABC News, produced *Lena's Dreams*.

Gary Perez (Julio) has recently been co-starring in *The Sopranos*. He recently completed a run in John Patrick Shanley's *Cellini* at 2nd Stage.

Tomo Omori (Shino) came from Japan and went to college in Monterey. Theater credits include *A Thousand Cranes*, *M Butterfly*, *Nonsense II*, and *Off The Strip*. She recently filmed leads in *Kuroi Hitsuji* and *The Hedonist*.

Elizabeth Wunsch (Beverly) is currently bringing her one woman play *Faces of Grace* to the New York stage. She just starred in a Frank Craven film, *Right vs Righteous*, and is producing an outrageous poetry project with her friends Tom, Jerry and Terry.

Jun Suenaga (Akira) is from Japan, where he had speaking parts in a number of Japanese-studio-produced films as well as independent productions. Recently he has been involved in theater in NYC.

John Chidiac (Marcus) and **Randolph Graff (Axel)** are grumpy anarchist computer wonks working on an as-yet-unnamed adult web site.

Kayoko Takahashi (Kyoko) is from Japan. She recently starred in the feature films *Disoriented* and *Black Male* and performed in *Talking With* at Theater 3. She is also a Japanese traditional dancer.

Al D. Rodriguez (Javier) has recently appeared in the films *El Septimo Cielo* and *Party Monster*; segments of the television shows *OZ*, *One Life to Live*, and *The NBC Hispanic Heritage Awards*; and traveled with the National Tour of *City of Angels*.

Will Keenan (Mike) recently appeared in *Margarita Happy Hour* and *Trick*, Good Machine's *Love God* and Troma's *Terror Firmer*.

Mariana Carreno (Cecilia) tours with Mabou Mines, with a show called *Belen-A Book of Hours*. She also recently completed a run in *Blind Alley* at the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

Images for Press

Sixteen images, in color and B&W, are available for download at <http://www.olympiapictures.com> as 300 dpi tiffs and jpegs, suitable for offset printing in sizes ranging from 4X5 to 8X10



festivals & playdates

1999 - 2001 (partial listing)

Los Angeles Independent Film Festival
Philadelphia Gay & Lesbian Film Festival
Chicago Underground Film Fest
Norwegian Film Festival, Hagesund
Bangkok Film Festival
Virginia Festival of American Film
San Francisco Indie Fest
New York Underground Film Festival
SciFi Channel Film Festival, NYC
Rio Di Janeiro Int'l Film Festival
Sao Paulo Film Festival
Philadelphia Secret Cinema
Cleveland Cinemateque
Brooklyn Heights Cinema
ICA Theater, London
Pioneer Theater, New York City
Cinema Du Parc, Montreal
The Japan Society, NYC

sales & rental information

U.S. Bookings: Olympia Pictures Inc.
P.O.B 398, New York NY 10013
Phone: 718.840.322 Fax: 718.622.0455
Email: info@olympiapictures.com

The Love Machine is available for domestic rental in 16mm, Beta SP, and DigiBeta.

The deposit for a single screening is \$200, for two screenings, \$350, and three screenings, \$400, against 35% of box office. Longer runs are negotiable.

Foreign Sales: Ava Stensland
AS1 International
Email: stensland@mindspring.com

Recent sales: BBC - UK
KLE - Finland
Synapse - Brazil