

utopia in four movements

A LIVE DOCUMENTARY BY SAM GREEN AND DAVE CERF

“The most compelling screening of the entire [Sundance] festival...*Utopia* was not only utterly moving but a reminder that there is real power in the physical experience of collectively watching cinema.” —*The Huffington Post*

“This is not an experience you can download and play on a laptop or a mobile phone. This is, in a very real sense, an utterly utopian ideal. For it’s a complete reaction to—indeed a rejection of—the current era’s mania to consume content on demand. To experience *Utopia in Four Movements*, you gotta go see Green and Cerf. It’s radical...” —*The Hollywood Reporter*



About *Utopia in Four Movements*

Throughout human history, people have had giddy dreams and fantastic notions about what the future would bring: space travel, peace, and a world of plenty are just a few. But as the 20th Century progressed, the future became more threatening than promising—as a wave of intractable problems loomed menacingly on the horizon. *Utopia in Four Movements* uses the collective experience of cinema to explore the battered state of the utopian impulse at the dawn of the 21st Century. How did we get here? And where are we going?

In this “live documentary,” filmmaker Sam Green cues a stunning pastiche of still and moving images and vignettes and recites *in-person* a poetic, entertaining, and poignant essay. Musician Dave Cerf constructs a live soundtrack of samples and loops, while the band The Quavers perform a lyrical score. Together, they sift through the history of the utopian impulse and search for insights about the way to build a vision of the future based on humankind’s noblest impulses. Thus, each performance is a singular live and emotional experience.

Interweaving archival and original materials, the audience is introduced to Esperanto, the fascinating man-made language designed to end war and cultural conflict; to an American exile living in Cuba, whose undying optimism counterpoints that of her crumbling surroundings—a time-capsule untouched by Capitalism; to the economic boom in China, manifested in the surreal space of the world’s largest shopping mall; and finally to the humanitarian field of forensic anthropology, which reflects both the disappointments of the 20th Century and humanity’s unending well of hope in its quest to give human remains in mass graves dignified burials.

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Praise for *Utopia in Four Movements*

The most compelling screening of the entire [2010 Sundance] festival. *Utopia* was not only utterly moving but a reminder that there is real power conjured through the irreplaceable and unreproducible experience of collectively watching cinema. — **The Huffington Post**

In *UTOPIA* Sam Green has produced a brilliantly witty, but also moving meditation on our loss of faith in the dream of progress. Sam has created something completely original - a new form of live story-telling that draws you in emotionally in a way that traditional documentaries almost always fail to do. I loved it. — **Adam Curtis, Director, *The Power of Nightmares***

The best film I saw at Sundance. It's luminous. In an age where transmedia and Web 3.0 is all the rage, perhaps Green was the biggest rebel at Sundance with his old-fashioned stance. He insists *Utopia in Four Movements* will only be performed live. "It's about utopia," he said to the festival audience, "Do you really want to watch this alone on your iPod?" — **DOX magazine**

A deep and moving account of the utopian desire and longing that uniquely characterized the 20th century. Green's voice and imagery will leave a lasting imprint on audiences. Green is an artist of rare talent and intelligence, managing to give the viewer an experience that is simultaneously haunting and invigorating. — **José Muñoz, Chair, Department of Performance Studies, NYU**

Utopia in Four Movements is that rare thing, intellectually compelling but also gut-wrenching, entertaining, and even funny at times. Sam makes for an engaging tour guide through a century that we can now see as remaking the human outlook. To be in his company for this one hour is to come to grips with what it is to be on this earth at this point in time, and it feels essential. — **Paul Sturtz, True/False Film Festival**

Sam Green's *Utopia in Four Movements* is a itself utopian act. In tackling the behemoth subject of utopia, Green and his collaborator Dave Cerf are attempting to re-invent and re-invigorate the movie going experience. Brilliant and thought-provoking, the movie is both moving and funny – and though it presents some dark realities and disturbing facts, manages to leave us with hope, and a renewed sense of humor about human beings as a species. — **Guinevere Turner**

The crucial thing is this is not an experience you can download and play on a laptop or a mobile phone. This is, in a very real sense, an utterly utopian ideal. For it's a complete reaction to — indeed a rejection of — the current era's mania to consume content on demand. To experience *Utopia in Four Movements*, you gotta go see Green and Cerf. It's radical. — **The Hollywood Reporter**



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Bios

Director — Sam Green is a San Francisco-based documentary filmmaker. His feature *The Weather Underground* was nominated for an Academy Award, broadcast nationally on PBS, and included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial. His other award-winning documentaries include *lot 63*, *grave c*, *The Rainbow Man/John 3:16*, *N-Judah 5:30*, and *Pie Fight '69*. Green has received grants from the Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and Creative Capital Foundations, and the NEA. He got his master's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied with acclaimed filmmaker Marlon Riggs. Green currently teaches at the University of San Francisco and the San Francisco Art Institute. www.samgreen.to

Co-director, music — Dave Cerf is a filmmaker, musician, sound artist, and software designer. His earliest memory is when his parents replaced his crib with a mainframe computer. After graduating California Institute of the Arts, he moved to the Bay Area and began collaborating with other musicians, filmmakers, and media artists. He composed music for Scott Kennedy's film *OT*: and Sam Green's *The Weather Underground*, and performed live musical and sound accompaniment over the films of Jennifer Reeves, Pat O'Neill, and Melinda Stone, including her 2003 California Tour of abandoned drive-in movie theaters. Dave also tours both in the U.S. and internationally with Threnody Ensemble—a band co-founded with longtime friend Erik Hoversten. Dave is currently a user interface designer at Apple, Inc., and is rapidly becoming the only person he knows without a cell phone.

Live Soundtrack — Brooklyn band The Quavers are T. Griffin, Catherine McRae and Dennis Cronin with other frequent collaborators. They coax a luminous sound out of decayed samplers, walkmans, vibraphonette, footpedal loopers, tape echo violin and homespun harmonies. Like a space-age Carter Family, they weave low-tech electronics around songs sturdy enough to stand up even if the power goes out. They call it "porch techno". They have released 4 CD's which can be found via their website: www.shinylittlerecords.com

Producer — Carrie Lozano is a Bay-Area based journalist and documentary filmmaker. Among other work, she produced and directed the award-winning film *Reporter Zero*, about journalist Randy Shilts, and produced the Academy-Award nominee *The Weather Underground*. She was recently a post-graduate fellow at the Investigative Reporting Program at U.C. Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism and is currently developing a documentary film about African-American poet June Jordan.

Producer — Jasmine Dellal is an award-winning documentary director and producer based in New York. She founded Little Dust Productions to make artistic and entertaining films that, in some small way, may help make the world a better place. Dellal was raised in England, but also spent much of her childhood with a grandmother in India. Her filmmaking career began in Berkeley, CA, under the wing of the iconic filmmaker Marlon Riggs. Dellal's documentary features *American Gypsy* and *When the Road Bends...* tales of a Gypsy Caravan both had theatrical, TV and DVD releases around the world. Now based in New York and London, Dellal is involved in all aspects of independent film work, from creation to distribution and extensive social outreach programs. www.littledust.com

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Director's Statement

The world is facing so many huge problems and challenges today, that utopia—as a way to illuminate possibilities, stir hope and the imagination—seems more important than ever. Utopia is for this project both a subject and a creative aspiration.

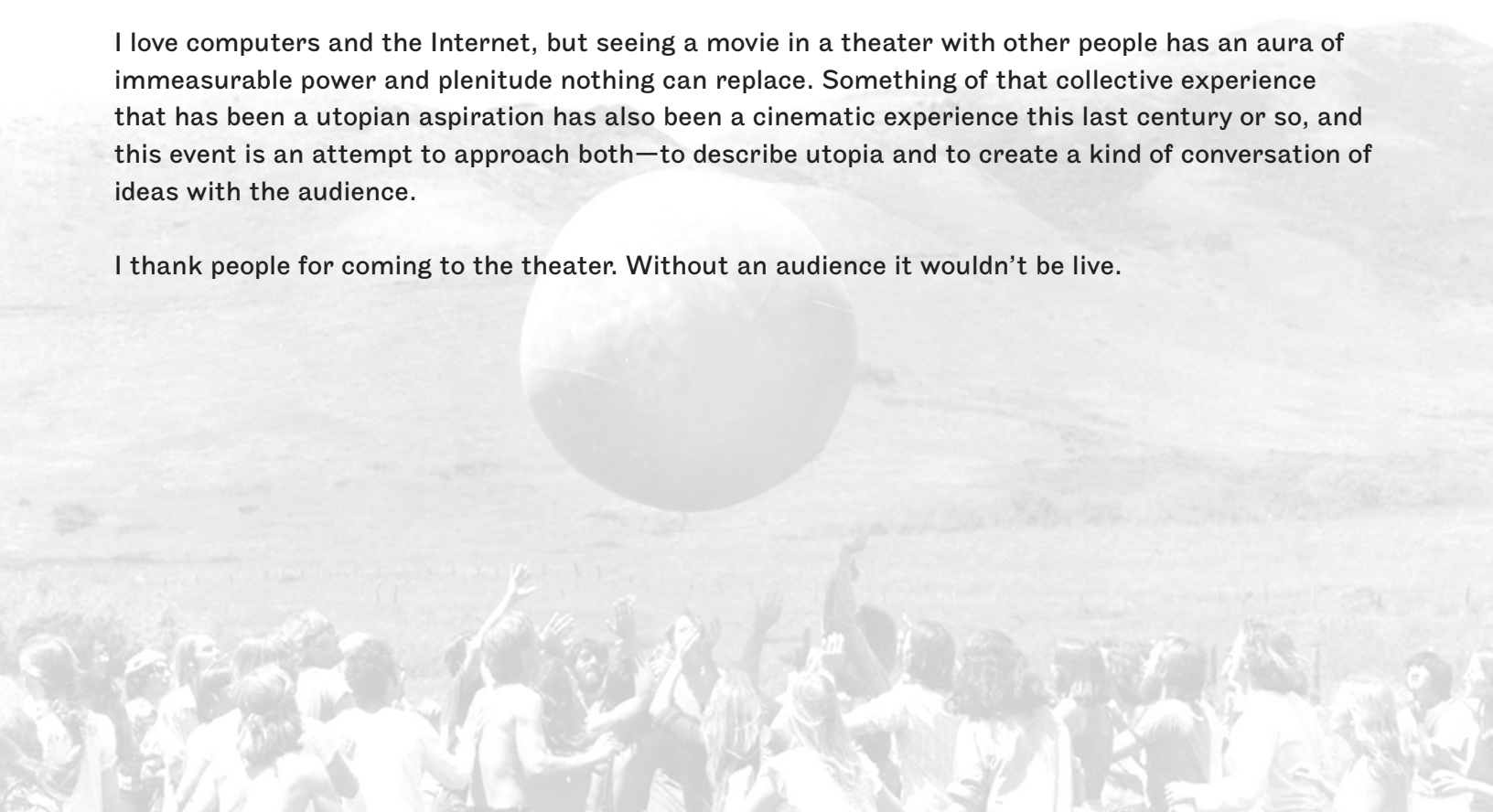
This “live documentary” form—I narrate the film in person and use Keynote to cue images while Dave Cerf mixes a soundtrack on his laptop—started out as just a way to put all the material together and screen it for people, sort of a live rough-cut. But over time, I've become quite fond of this as an approach.

The ‘live-ness’ seems especially fitting. At its heart, utopia is almost always about collectivity, about transcending the boundaries of our individual lives to connect with something larger. In this era, when there are so many forces pushing us into private and mediated experiences, the simple act of getting together with other people to talk, catch up, drink, and have a collective experience is a small utopian gesture.

This kind of live event is also a response to the crisis facing cinema today. Most of my students rarely consider going to see a film in a theater. They can see a film more cheaply at home as a DVD or for free on YouTube. It seems as if filmmakers either have to embrace the notion of people watching their work furtively, in stolen moments, on laptops and iPods, or create something that cannot be reduced to a digital file.

I love computers and the Internet, but seeing a movie in a theater with other people has an aura of immeasurable power and plenitude nothing can replace. Something of that collective experience that has been a utopian aspiration has also been a cinematic experience this last century or so, and this event is an attempt to approach both—to describe utopia and to create a kind of conversation of ideas with the audience.

I thank people for coming to the theater. Without an audience it wouldn't be live.



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Big Utopia, Little Utopias

Program Essay by Rebecca Solnit

Thank you for coming to this performance today. The word utopia means, literally, no place and this is a movie that unlike almost all other movies can only be in one place at a time, this place you're in now with its filmmaker Sam Green and musician Dave Cerf. This is a film that's both about utopia and an attempt to embody it by weaving together images and ideas and spoken words that will never be replicated exactly, a movie being born as you see and hear it, as alive as music.

Utopia always meant people together. The utopian impulse of a century ago was gregarious and altruistic; the hopeful and the radical didn't want to just solve their own problems or save their own lives; they wanted to do it for all of us, everyone, everywhere, and all those in the eras yet to come. From the early days of the Russian Revolution to the late phases of the Black Panthers, they dared to dream big dreams, dreams that everything could be different, that human nature could be all but reinvented and suffering and injustice all but eliminated. They might have been amazingly wrongheaded about both means and ends, and most of us would disagree with their vision of paradise, but the hope and bravado are still inspiring. Few among us now are so confident that the world could be changed. These big utopias were never realized, though the world has changed in countless ways since, for the worse and for the better, partly by hopes and dreams acted upon.

Maybe little utopias are realized all the time, the utopias of people together in spirit and in body for a dance or a protest and everything inbetween. And sometimes we only realize their sweetness as they recede. A lot of us now look back at the golden age of cinema as a bygone paradise, a minor but sublime coexistence of strangers in the dark drawn together to see a flicker of projected light come to life onscreen. Television chopped up movies with commercials and put them in the middle of domestic distraction, but that was nothing compared to this moment when films are on your iPhone and your laptop and in fuzzy tiny windows on YouTube. The worst thing about these new modes of viewing isn't that they diminish cinema as visual and imaginative spectacle. The worst thing is that they're watched furtively and alone. Cinema, which was once a great banquet in a dream palace is now often a snack devoured absentmindedly in isolation. And only in society, only together, do we have the power to live out those old dreams, or new ones.

Utopia is sociable, and Green and Cerf's *Utopia in Four Movements* gives you back the sociability of a movie, the way it was always about coexisting, by making it as live as a silent movie with an orchestra, a nineteenth-century Chautauqua lecture, a sermon or a party. Take it as an invitation to think about utopia, not only the old ones that might have failed, but whatever faint aroma of paradise might arise in a room where you hope and think and breathe with others.

