

## Libera Lernejo!

Jeff Foye and Gordon Winiemko

In the year 2099, everyone will speak the same language. Or they should.

That's why we propose –

A Free Esperanto School and Cultural Center.

After all, Esperanto was conceived by its creator, a Polish ophthalmologist, to be a universal language, fostering peace and understanding among the world's peoples. With so much recent focus on living in harmony with the planet, we propose to return to a consideration of living in harmony with each other, and to repurpose this tool for sustainable relations.

Prior to the opening of the Free School, we intend to arouse interest through a viral marketing “teaser” campaign. We imagine a slow build to a full reveal of the Free School, beginning with a simple symbol (in the manner of Vienna Convention road signs), progressing to a slogan -- “Libera Lernejo!” – and then to a website that will expound on the philosophy behind the School, without identifying the School explicitly.

Once interest has been seeded, and we arrive in Copenhagen, we will reveal the object of the marketing campaign, and open the Free School (“Libera Lernejo”).

Following the established model of artist-as-teacher, and using the performance skills we have honed as collaborators, we will team-teach introductory courses in Esperanto. But we will not just sit back and wait for people to respond to our viral marketing campaign, and come to us. We will also take the school to the streets, visiting restaurants, bars and other public gathering places. Our goal will be nothing less than to guide people in Copenhagen to adopt Esperanto in daily speech.

Adopting a practical approach to learning the language, we envision mini seminars to help students apply their lessons in their daily lives, such as “Esperanto in the Workplace,” “Vacationing with Esperanto,” and “How to Flirt in Esperanto.”

Aside from the curriculum in Esperanto, which implies a post-national view of the world, we are choosing not only the form of the school but the Free School – and the Free School Without Walls, for that matter – as a model of an altruistic and post-capitalistic society.

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As part of this post-national, post-capital ethic, and wanting the global public to take part in the processes of the work, we will also offer distance learning courses via the project website.

Then there is the “Cultural Center” aspect of the project. At the site we are requesting, we propose to offer a library of Esperanto media, including not only written texts but all the Esperanto rock music we can get our hands on. Yes, such a thing exists.

And films. Though we will try to get a hold of all four films made in Esperanto, we can definitely promise screenings of the 1966 film *Incubus*, starring William Shatner and an all-Esperanto speaking cast. Ideally, screenings will take place in a café-type environment, where viewers can commune in a convivial environment (and perhaps enjoy a nice beverage) and engage in dialogue about the films as they are screened.

We also intend for people to engage in dialogue about the cultural practice of Utopianism, from a critical perspective. For, what else is the aim of New Life Copenhagen 2099, but to envision the future, to envision Utopia? What else is the aim of the language of Esperanto but to bring Utopia about? And yet, as Saussure famously pointed out, language resists deliberate plans to shape it; it has a life of its own. Indeed, Esperanto was devised over a hundred years ago, but it has attained at best the status of “second language.” We might one day have a universal language, but no one can determine what that language will be, or how it will evolve.

What does that say about other kinds of plans to bring about a better world, or determine the future?

And yet, at the same time, the very act of fostering dialogue is itself a Utopian pursuit; behind it lays the hope of mutual understanding. And Esperanto, in the language itself, is a word that literally means “one who hopes.”

So, turning away from Esperanto for a moment, let us consider *Don Quixote de La Mancha*, the novel that helped cement the modern Spanish language. Like its titular hero, we too want to tilt at windmills, albeit with full awareness of our illusions, and with renewed vigor in our quixotic pursuits grounded in that awareness.

We want to teach the world Esperanto!