

# Open School East

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# ORGANISE

# IN HOPE

# NOT

# FEAR

**Wish you'd been here**

is a collaborative project by  
Eva Rowson and Andrea Francke

Hospitality and DIY have always been an important part of our individual practices but at Open School East it quickly became clear how the type of spaces and social relations we were interested in creating conflicted with many of the characteristics of the institution that we inhabited. Through *Wish you'd been here* we organise different types of events, from film nights to parties for 200+ people, to using profits from the bar to buy a barbecue (which should not be underestimated in its pedagogical function). Our process has involved researching the history of parties in all their potentially radical forms, with a special focus on how they can be bubbles in which to experiment with different ways of setting an event and hosting it, and how these can conduce different social relations.

We funded the first parties at OSE ourselves, using any profit to pay the performers and contributors, and putting the remainder towards the next event. Early on, we were asked to separate our parties from the main OSE public programme, as our model for charging for entrance and refreshments, which was seemingly making a profit, could not be aligned with OSE's charitable accounts. *Wish you'd been here* has had to exist outside the economy of school, and instead we have been able to create an economy of our own.

At one of our parties, for example, we stopped charging for entrance and food at a point when we had made enough money to cover our costs. This transformed the interaction between people who didn't know each other, and suddenly everybody started treating each other as if they were friends of friends. At one point party guests were manning the bar, just because they enjoyed being part of it and helping. For every party we now do, we always have people volunteering in different ways, which has been a helpful and interesting way to reflect on questions of economy, labour, politics, organisation and consequence, and in particular how to remunerate people and share authorship.

We decided to combine *Wish you'd been here* with Andrea's text *The Economics of Free* because they have fed into each other during OSE. We make a clear point of not labelling our events as art projects as an attempt to show how a project that doesn't act out or represent parties but actually hosts them can help remind us, even if just for a small period of time, that there are different ways to do things, to relate to each other, to exist in the world. It's about hope as the belief in the potential of the future, of little utopias of possible alternatives, replacing the fear of failing, of not making sense, of not building something that can be incorporated by art and the institutions of art.

*Wish you'd been here* began as a response to the discourse of socially engaged art we found embedded in OSE and as a way to think about different frameworks for practices that involve working with people. So should you wonder about the critical relevance of throwing parties, the viability of a project that resists a clear outcome or targeted audience, and the market-ability of something that is only describable in an incredibly long list of interests and demands to be experienced in the flesh, we would like to say: please come and party with us, to see the possibilities of a different kind of social practice - we wish you'd been here...

Eva and Andrea  
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