

Four years of learning how to kindle a fire and —more importantly—keep it going. Of tending to the fickle flames that at times were reduced to little more than waning embers. And at other moments warmed our weary bones by bringing friends—old and new alike—together around the modest hearth of our ill-equipped kitchen. Four years of fanning the flames and feeding the fire by blowing kisses, hissing hexes, whistling comforting tunes. Learning how to care. How to neither burn out nor fade away.

How to Stay Lit

This short text is a little glimpse into four years of Lymy, the sparks of hope we found and the ways we worked through the times when the flame nearly flickered out.



We originally intended to squat a space near Kallio. We felt that Helsinki was lacking in political social spaces albeit there was (and is!) a small legalized squat—Makamik—in Kumpula and some quiet squats that were intended more for living than socializing. Meanwhile, 82% of vacant office spaces in the capital region were not rented out. Squatting would have been the obvious choice to make.

However, constantly being in precarious life situations and on the verge of burnout were, and still are, the unfortunate norms in our circles, and from experience, we knew that squatting would require a lot of time and commitment. The conflict between political ideals and political realities soon became obvious—the desire for togetherness while being torn apart by the effects of late capitalism.

For months we—a mixed bunch of people in their 20s and 30s, some who had been friends or comrades for a long time and others who were meeting each other for the first time—met in parks and each others' homes to discuss the Invisible Committee's

HOW TO STAY LIT

To Our Friends, contrasting and complementing it with other short texts that people suggested. What we were reading soon became secondary to getting to know each other, seeing where and how the others live, drinking coffee in each others' living rooms, eating ice cream out in the sunlight, doing whatever goes into becoming friends.

Then one day, upon finding an ad for what could be a suitable space, those meandering conversations we had been having around the quite abstract ideas of for example 'life in common', 'building the commune', 'new forms of life' began to take shape in the physical world.

We don't have any clear set goals. For now we want to experiment, what do we want to use the space for, what makes us stronger and happier. We want to see this as a political space, but it won't be political just by defining it as such, maybe just trying to view life in its entirety as political, and by being together, committing to each other through friendship this could be the starting point. (NOTES FROM DECEMBER 2015)

We found the messiness of ideas and desires the only appropriate place to start from. However anxiety-inducing at times, our lack of direction was not only a failure of being able to set reachable goals but part and parcel of the sometimes painful process of figuring things out together.

During the first year we organized regular Sunday dinners, rotating cooking duties. Spending time together discussing whatever while eating pasta helped keep away the approaching cold and dark outside. We hosted book launches, presentations and lectures by outside groups, local group meetings in our space, clothes swaps and restaurant days.

However in our second year, Lymy experienced a crisis that almost ended the entire project. The connection between our daily lives and the space had withered away and we kept asking ourselves how the space even contributed to our project (whatever that was). Was our current space on Hämeentie 30 failing

HOW TO STAY LIT

us, should we move, or should we just call it quits altogether?

— I feel we are really disconnected from the places of struggle. Places to go and build comradery.

— I totally feel like that too. I've lost hope in any political change. I felt nothing when reading "To Our Friends" because it felt so distant.

(NOTES FROM A 2016 GOOGLE DOC TITLED HOW TO KILL A FIRE)

Suddenly a new less expensive space was found and we quickly made the decision to move to Pengerkatu. There were a few less members but the sense of a fresh start sparked new hope and energy in us. The place on Pengerkatu 6 was bigger but it had old, stained plastic flooring, a nonexistent kitchen, and stairs here and there making it less accessible than even the old place but we nonetheless started blowing into the embers, trying to get a flame going again. With unsure steps we started remaking the space, working through the question: Can we build a different space, one that not only affects ourselves, but our friends and comrades around us?

To be clear I think it might be a bad idea to have just some snacks and wine without any political content. I think the space would easily become just another hangout for people who want to drink cheap beer. I also like hangout places and cheap beer, but I would like to build something else within the framework of this project.

(LYMY MEMBER'S COMMENT ABOUT OPEN THURSDAYS FROM 2018)



The text at hand stems from a trip we made together to Copenhagen in the spring of 2019. Having a little newfound joy and energy about what we were doing, we wanted to discuss what we were dreaming of and set out some ideas of what we might do next. We decided to formulate our desires and tactics for the future based on what we were already doing, what felt good about it and what was making us and those around us stronger—a sort of

HOW TO STAY LIT

affirmation that made it possible for us to see how our project could be joyful and expansive. We found ourselves circling around certain topics that helped structure our thoughts: a *life in common*, an *ethics* of our own, a space for *affective* relations and encounters and our place in this specific material *territory*.

The following text is an attempt to verbalize these ideas in an associative way. The text is not intended to be a manifesto or a toolbox for political action as such. Nor does the text emerge from ‘nowhere’ but is in constant discussion with other texts, borrowing, circulating and developing already spelled out ideas. Moreover, we are well aware that political struggles do not always unfold in a register of common dreaming and inspiration, but often emerge from a response to an urgent situation such as the ones we see around us, from Santiago de Chile, via Rojava to Hong Kong. However, we stress the importance of also focusing on social reproduction and the creation of new forms of life, to find ways of keeping even the smallest sparks alive.



What does a shared life look like here and now?
This is how we start, this is where we dwell and this
the beginning of our lived experiment.

We want to build new forms of life since the old ones appear to have lost their momentum. Strictly private spaces and confined social forms exhaust us. To grow our strength and connect our forces we need shared spaces, shared experiences and shared lives.

Lymy—the space we rent together—is where we come together; to work, eat, build and think with each other. Like an acaleph that stretches its tentacles and brings them back together again, the ‘we’ takes different shapes, at times embracing a heterogeneous crowd in the Lymy cafés, aperitivos, open doors, social dinners and events where we build the common, and at times focusing on intensive small scale planning and dreaming. In this sense life in common is an idea in flux,

HOW TO STAY LIT

the desire stays but its expression changes with time and with whoever constitutes the 'we'. What we want from life and each other is not static and therefore our shared life is not static.

We get a used fatboy from the art school clearance, our space looks 20% more like a startup. We have a slogan on the door and an espresso machine, so might as well.

Life in common means undermining the atomization of life that's imposed on us. The capitalist system produces precarity and anxiety, suffocating infrastructure and expensive living, loneliness and lack of reciprocity. These problems are not created at an individual level and can't therefore be solved on the individual level alone—be it by therapy, career-making, self-care or meditation. We see them as fundamental problems related to the capitalist mode of production and the social life it creates.

Nevertheless, *we live in a society* and carry its trauma, but our collective horizon is not closed off by those social structures. We don't see the necessity of choosing either this or that way of living, but of combining strategies of living in this society while finding ruptures to investigate together, work from and shape to house transformative projects.

But let's be clear, finding other ways of being and living together is a struggle in itself. We need to constantly keep pushing back against the oppressive gravity of being pulled apart into our separate, increasingly distant orbits.

The plan is to create new forms of life from shared experiences that happen in our living rooms, our communal spaces, the surrounding parks, spontaneous parties. From what happens every day, and every night.

The focus of Lymy is in creating continuity—between individuals, groups, spaces, movements—as opposed to discontinuity of practice, breaks in knowledge, separation between people. Everyone of us is needed if we're to become a transformative force. Therefore we need to build our common spaces and

HOW TO STAY LIT

shared life from the hubs where our ideas of new forms of life connect. All efforts to reduce our heterogeneity are doomed to fail. We have all been institutionalized in a capitalist system that needs outsiders for its inside to function and programmed to handle difference with fear and hate but we can turn this constellation upside down, and use our differences to make us stronger.

Do you need to be familiar with a certain activist scene, a particular way of talking, of concepts and rhetorics? I never felt self-assured enough to really question or criticize. Perhaps I would end up disappointing everyone? Would I just appear as a boring pragmatist, a lost reactionary? Since then, I've learned that others have similar questions, and I've often wondered what makes me so afraid of saying something. Later on, some of the concepts I initially perceived as abstract, begin to take a more palpable form.



To exist in the making is to start from the things we want to do and support emerging ideas. This means focusing on what *feels important and inspiring* instead of struggling to find out *what is to be done*. In the beginning we had high ambitions but few outspelled tools—the horizon of our common project seemed far away. By doing instead of fixating on a clear vision we built on accumulated knowledge produced through trials and errors. We accepted the fact that we cannot do everything, we can only start from where we stand.

We started to distance ourselves from the structure of the meeting and move towards the form of a shared life. Through this process we are constantly learning to emphasize and value friendship—both in its spontaneous form and as intentionally built. By spending time together we begin to understand how valuable it is to **seize the moment** and harness the energy that arises therein.

HOW TO STAY LIT

First day of summer we meet spontaneously in Lymy, we bring the chairs out on the sidewalk and feel the sun for the first time in months. We decide to explore our backyard to see if we could start some planting boxes there for our herbs. When we get there, we find that chives have spread out from their box and taken over the whole yard.

However, spontaneity as a way forward comes with a demand for structure. How to support reproduction, how to reproduce a common life, how to look after each other, and how to grow together? Our previous experiences of different activist milieus remind us of all the times that those projects imploded under their failures at making nonhierarchy work, where informality led to uneven sharing of responsibility. Moreover, the traces left by old Lymy members who have decided to leave the project provide a ground for learning and an impetus for making significant transformations in our reproductive structures.

We visit our friends abroad to talk about our strategy, to dream, we come back in a week and all our herbs and mushrooms have died. Everyone else is busy with work, but two of us throw out the dead plants, clean the kombucha and start again.

We recognize the importance of making visible non-hierarchical structures and the sharing of tasks. We want to rid ourselves of the remains of invisible housework and emotional labor by making them visible and acknowledged. The realm of social reproduction is where the struggle for new forms of life takes place. Bringing to light the difficulties we face in this process of sharing makes tangible the abstract idea of social struggle in our lived experiences. Lymy is not finished. To exist is to be in the making.

One time, we rearranged the whole kitchen because we wanted to, after a few beers and our day-long cleaning and organising talko had ended. It turned out terrific and I felt excited. Another

HOW TO STAY LIT

time I cried a bit when I got home from a meeting because it felt like no one even bothered to answer when someone else made a suggestion.



Lymy as a way of life is *affective*. It is something that touches us in an unspecified manner differently from the more traceable feelings.

An affect — what is it? Not a feeling that comes from inside an individual but arises in an individual from their relationship, or something, we think all feelings are like this, so maybe we don't understand what an affect is...

Affective relations grow between people, occasions, things, animals and other types of living creatures that enter our shared life. Living things that inhabit our space, like the kombucha that we make, the oyster mushrooms that we'll eventually share on our plates, a worm compost that we hope would someday produce soil for our herbs from our organic waste.

My relationship with these ways of thinking about self-sufficiency has been paranoid. I would like to imagine a future with some sort of collective industrial agriculture.

Through experimenting with various ecologies we can get a glimpse of how it might feel to produce and eat food in a scenario of global agricultural collapse following capitalism's failure to curb climate change. Some of these tentative projects become lasting, others fade away and are replaced by new ones. We accept that the future will be messy: we can only build from where we are right now and have no choice but to keep doing so.

The connections created and the relations that emerge in Lymy become part of the space. We invite more friends, family members, acquaintances, romantic partners and love interests to participate in events held at Lymy. New developments not only unfold between the people present, but expand to include other political projects and their members.

HOW TO STAY LIT

Each time we enter Lymy, the chairs are arranged differently, hinting at the different forms the space takes on different occasions. It's wondrous how perhaps fifty or even a hundred different people use the space each week. Each one of them contributing something, sharing something. An unexpectedly cleaned floor gives a certain joy and relief as it reminds us that the sharing of effort can work. But coming across an organic waste bin that has started living a life of its own after having overextended its welcome in the space provokes a grimace that takes a moment to wash off. Life in common might not be here yet, but it's beginning to take shape amongst us and others.

After a while the fatboy feels like the wrong move. It gets to move to a new home elsewhere in Kallio, where Tero the dog now finds comfort in it.



Our *ethics* is based on the reciprocal net of friendships while our daily practice is situated in Kallio. To have a firm ground in the territory is a way for us to inhabit the space, to make Lymy an **eternal flame**, beyond the confines of individual events and project-based lives.

A few of us are hanging out in Lymy, spending a late summer evening with nothing special in mind. As the evening turns into night, we notice how our street is getting unusually busy. Flow. We get an idea to set up a pop-up info table in front of our space. Most passersby are interested in beverages, but some of them wake up the next morning with a How to Start a Fire in their pocket.

We strive to grow roots that multiply, dig deeper and reach further out: multiplying and deepening friendships, while reaching out to our neighbors and to new territories. We make connections by finding signs of autonomous life and culture in the surrounding blocks, the neighboring districts, in the city of Helsinki and in nodes of self-organized projects around the globe.

After a meeting we're tired, but there is a new squat in the city. We bring drinks and some

HOW TO STAY LIT

pamphlets. The city has cut the power and in the quiet candlelight of this old wooden house, we ask the squatters the same question we keep asking ourselves "What do you need?". They say they don't really need anything and we leave after sitting on the floor and talking a little. After the cops evict them, they come to Lymy to write a zine.



This text is a result of several discussions and meetings. It has been a collective process and effort where every one in Lymy has contributed with thoughts and experiences—some occasionally and others throughout the whole process. In many ways, it illustrates some of the central processes of making and upholding the Lymy collective: the process can be slow, sometimes frustrating, questions are left hanging in the air, silences, time passes and nothing happens, then a sudden wave of inspiration and collective moves that push the process forward.

With this text, we want to start more systematically gathering our thoughts and ideas and sharing the process of Lymy with all its messiness and ambiguity, all its ups and downs. We imagine that some of these experiences are shared and widespread, which perhaps could help us approach the challenges we face as we recognize that others grapple with similar questions. Hopefully, this text could spark a discussion on what it's like to reproduce a communal project and shared space like Lymy and even inspire new friendships, new collective efforts and help to combat political and social isolation.

Lymy has given us proof that we are able to and desire to do something long term. When something lasts for a longer time, the more difficult moments blend into the bigger picture, helping to see what ultimately gives more than it takes, what at the end of the day brings more joy than sorrow. Learning is tumultuous; growing pains are part of any process of maturing.