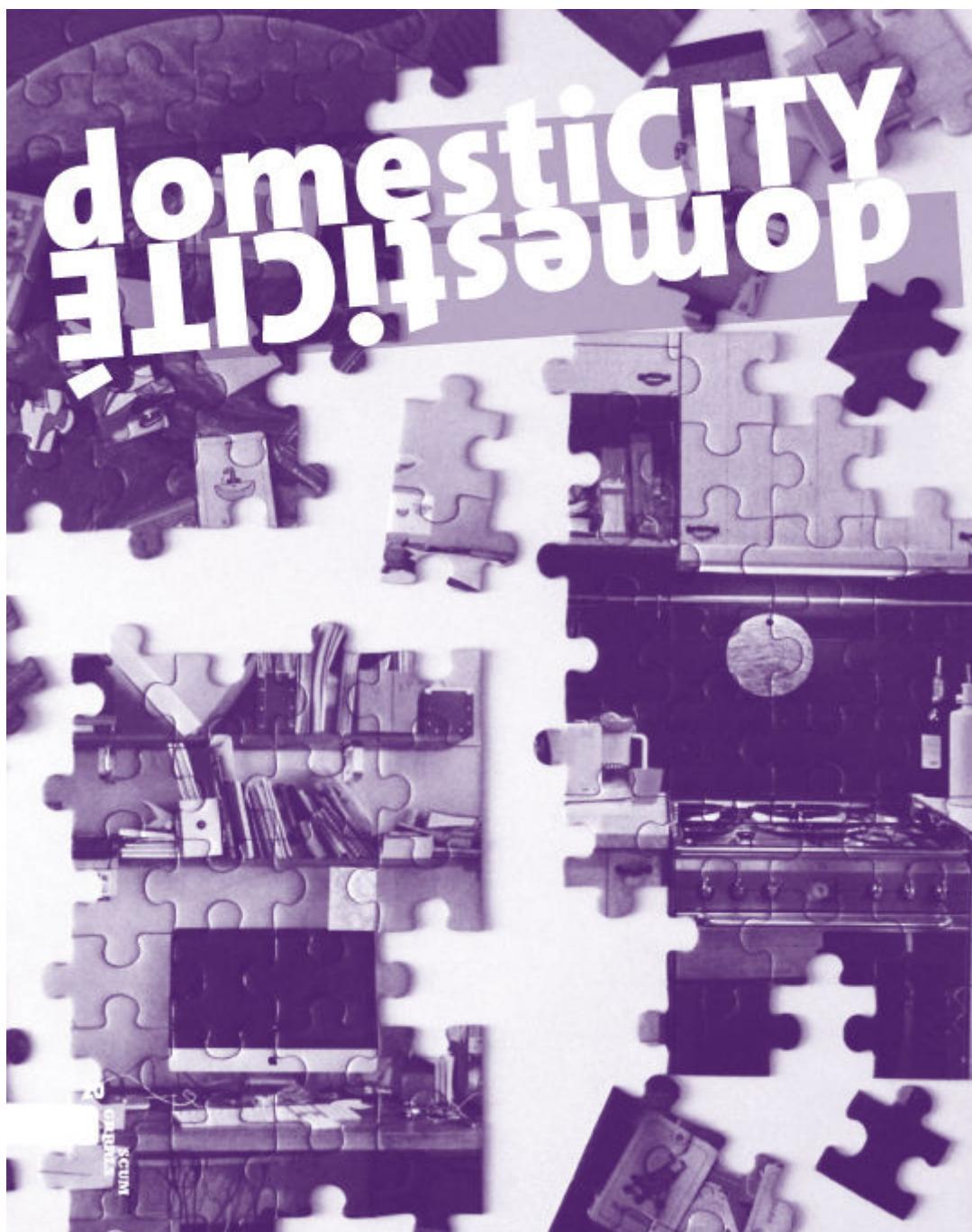


Towards the domestication of feminism... ? ... my individual 'life puzzle'

by [Malin Björk](#)

As feminists we are more than aware that the way we organise the 'private' has an impact on how the 'public' sphere is shaped, which in its turn shapes the 'private'/domestic. All political actors – from right to left – have a view and in one way or the other want to regulate what happens in our homes. Who should take care of children, who can sleep with who, distinct ideas on why and what 'families' are for, etc.



Feminists have politicised the seemingly private, the home, the family, sexualities - it is one of feminisms most important contributions to understanding the societies we live in I believe. Feminists have made it obvious that the way care is organised in our societies is a political choice, which has a huge impact on gender equality, the economy, and on social ties. If there is no accessible care for children and other dependants, women will continue to carry the bulk of this work in an unpaid capacity. Feminists have also exposed that the home is a major arena of violence against women, and that rather than being a safe, pleasant sanctuary, the home can be the most dangerous place to be.

Today however, there seems to be a growing individualist take on the intersections between private and public – each and everyone has to organise their life-puzzle (as it has been called by some). Our home becomes a central arena where the pieces of the ‘lifepuzzle’ are laid out, the arena where we should successfully realise the heterosexual project of finding the right balance between work and family, children’s activities, creative stimulation, physical and outdoor activities, etc.

Although the term is gender neutral, this kind of lifepuzzling is of course primarily a woman’s job - being the tireless logistical, practical, and care giving coordinator. And even if it is obvious that my ‘puzzle’ is dependent on public policies (or absence of them), the very term indicates that it is an issue of some game or exercise I do mainly with my family/clan, and for which I am ultimately responsible myself. Despite this, and in some peculiar way, the increased focus on how I shape/ ‘manage’ my domestic organisation – my “lifepuzzle” – is more and more viewed to be some kind of sufficient ‘political’ action ?

This more individually focused turn on the feminist private/political stakes are happening at the same time as we would actually desperately need to get collectively organised against very serious attacks on women’s rights and equality. In particular, there is a renewed right-wing liberal and conservative push for regulating women’s return to the family/private. For different reasons, but all the same they want the ‘family’ (i.e. women) to do more of the care work. The conservatives because that is what women do best (pfff). There is a dream that the collective projects should stop at our doorsteps. Beyond that door, there is a marvellous place where food is served, clothes cleaned, care is provided, where relationships are ‘genuine’, driven by other values and dynamics than in a public sphere (characterised by profit maximising and competition). A space outside the realm of politics and collective choice, an arena for ‘purely’ individual - but altruistic - choices.

The liberals also want to shove over more carework on the family (women), but for different reasons – it is simply the cheapest option a waiting the privatisation of the whole health and care sector and make it another glorious arena for market liberalism (with the inequalities that would result in).

The quasi-feminists discourse on the centrality of the lifepuzzle to some extent plays into the hands of these forces, privileging a folding in on the private, instead of seeing the structural causes and addressing these. At the same time, the concept of ‘life-puzzle’ has the strength of putting a word to what many women (and men) feel and experience in daily life – trying to organise the week, month and year around

the complex needs of children, work, home and health. And it is 'people talk'. It makes it something we discuss over a long lunch with friends ? But not something that calls for political action, that gets us upset and mobilised. It is a personal (but somehow shared) low- or high level frustration over what is more and more defined as domestic organisation.

However true the feelings and frustrations linked to the organisation of daily life are, the folding in on individual life puzzles cannot mobilise our political force. It reduces our capacity to collectively invent and create political alternatives. The situations we are facing and experiencing individually in our homes have political and structural backgrounds and roots. Focusing on the individual expression and outcomes, the clan, the project of home and family, is in this sense threatening for feminism.

Politics is not just there to support us to better manage our individual situations. Politics, and feminism in particular, is also and foremost about how we want to live together, what are important and what we want to share. So let's stop minding so much our own business, let's make the individual truly political, remembering that structural and collective changes are almost always more effective to address our individual problems.