

## **Dirty Laundry**

A Photo Series by Tarek Al-Zand

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The individual everyday experience is increasingly a private one. The activities involved in working, cleaning, entertaining and eating can all be achieved while remaining invisible to the public eye. Public action has been minimized and understood to be privileged when one can relocate a once public act to a private space. Download a movie, convert a spare bedroom to an office, search/chat/love online, microwave your dinner, trouble-shoot with tech support...and if desperate, drive your passengerless car to the drive-through bank. More than ever, the home is an omnipotent-witness of our waking lives. The individual experience achieves progress through speed, multi-tasking and the coercive nature of competitive living. The result of this social transformation, besides the rise of isolation, is an elimination of the middle man and ground. A social anemia fueled by technology and sustained through efficiency-obsession. Check the e-mail again. There is no more trading a loaf of bread for a fresh fish, just do it on your own.

In many ways, this technology-based alienation is strongly linked to capitalism. Money allows you to bypass the public sphere. No one has a desire to: 1) Find money 2) Walk to the store 3) Find the product 4) Pay for the product. "Normal consumption" only takes a virtual minute and creates more "free time". The logic is that public action is justifiably marginalized as it is equated with longer waiting-times and overall inefficiency. But, in some cases, more is accomplished by doing things the long way. The washer runs, the TV reports on

stocks, the phone rings, and the online bills load in your browser...your tamagotchi is dead.

Beneath the hyperactivity, there are still public spaces that remain active. One example is the laundry mat. In many urban centers, bingo parlors, talk-easys and bowling alleys are disappearing, but one shared-activity space that continues to thrive is the laundry facility. Washing clothes is something that we all need/want to do. It is not intended as a social space; individuals perform a task that is strictly functional. However, it is also an opportunity to remain idle and rest. Like public transit, it is a forced incubation/reflection period until we get there or until it gets done – old mechanical slow-motion that one cannot avoid. The blank time at the laundry mat (that is not task-oriented) allows the individual's mental and physical space to decompress.

The continual promotion of progress revolves around eliminating “waiting time.” The series, *Dirty Laundry*, illustrates people performing a task and waiting for its completion. A public space for an activity that increasing numbers consider private. But it is the “extremity” of this public action that makes it attractive. It is a planned event rather than a background task. It is the assigning of privilege to a functional action (even if not by choice) that allows the individual a moment to naturally move through imaginative space. Maybe we all need more of this.