

# ARTISTS SPACE

RHIZOME at the New Museum  
“Private Lives”  
Tyler Coburn  
May 8, 2008  
www.rhizome.org

The New Normal  
April 26 - June 21, 2008

RHIZOME AT THE NEW MUSEUM

## Private Lives

By [Tyler Coburn](#) on Thursday, May 8th, 2008 at 2:47 pm.



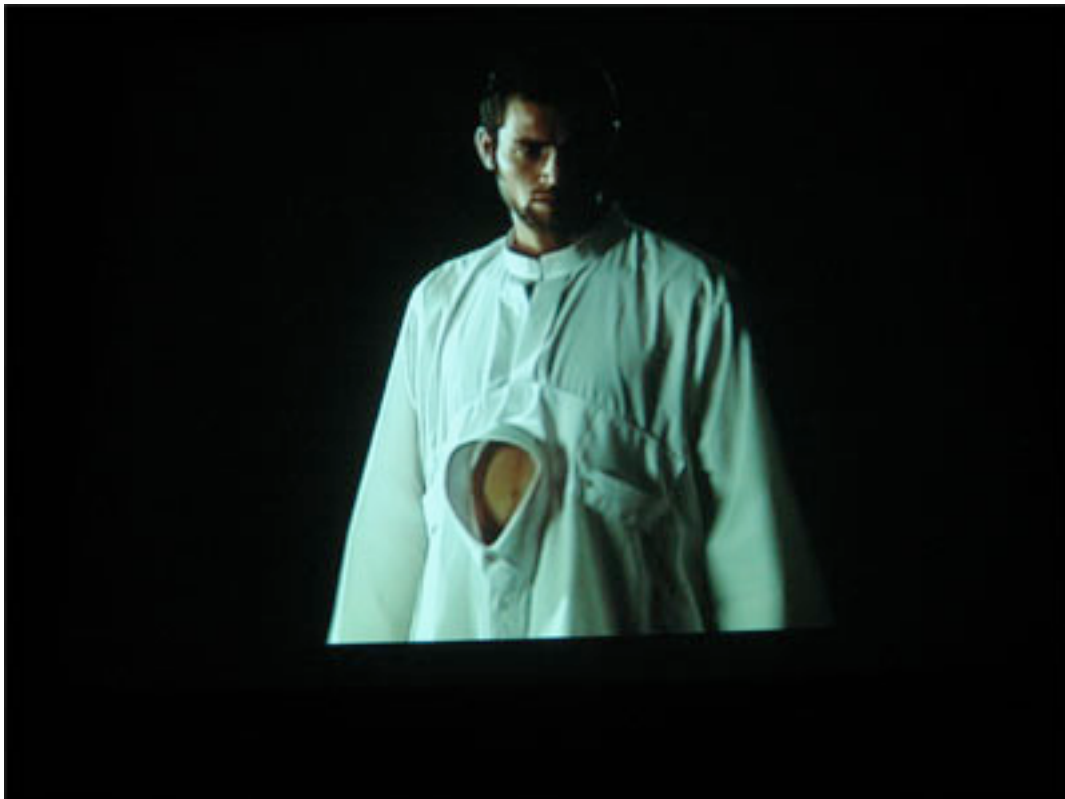
*Sophie Calle, Unfinished, 2005*

[The New Normal](#), an exhibition currently on display at [Artists Space](#), assembles works from thirteen practitioners, all of which were made after 2001 and are somehow representative of the emergent conditions of public and private life in America and beyond. Curator Michael Connor borrows

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his exhibition title from Dick Cheney's notorious post-9/11 speech, in which the vice president characterized the forthcoming encroachments on citizens' private lives as "the new normalcy." What makes Connor's exhibition truly revelatory, however, is the way it proposes this "rise of state and corporate surveillance" to be as definitive, in the shaping of the private sphere, as the willingness of millions of members of the populous to voluntarily make their private lives public, by means of online venues for personal blogging, image and video diaries, and social networks. This trend, if anything, indicates that for the twenty-first century public, "private information is not always something to fear." To the contrary, Connor argues that the power entailed in this type of public disclosure can be harnessed in the service of new forms of cultural production and new "tactics for political critique."



*Sharif Waked, Chic Point, 2003*

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Support for this point can be found throughout the exhibition. Bangladesh-born, U.S.-based artist Hasan Elahi's 2002 airport interrogation by FBI agents, for example, prompted his developing *Tracking Transience*, a personal website monitoring his spending, calls and location, with photo documentation for support. Elahi's project serves a pragmatic end - as virtual alibi - but does so in a conceptually telling fashion: requiring the artist to internalize state power and subject his life to the degree of scrutiny the government reserves for suspected terrorists. In a similar vein, Palestinian artist Sharif Waked's single-channel video *Chic Point* (2003) shows a parade of men catwalking in oddly revealing clothing. Fronts and backs of shirts and jackets are cut, rolled, or loosely woven to show certain parts of the body, aiding wearers - the video later suggests - in the often aggressive security proceedings at Israeli checkpoints on the West Bank. While playful in conception, *Chic Point*, as with many of the works in this exhibition, achieves an incisive form of critique - as much a product of the present geopolitical realities and borrowed tropes of public culture as of the personal vision of its maker. - Tyler Coburn