Privileged Tactics II

Work-in-progress, September 2008

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Introduction

This booklet presents Privileged Tactics II, which in September 2008 is still *work-in-progress*. It describes how the ideas for the project have evolved, and where we are heading with the work. The idea is to share our working process with others.

Why Privileged Tactics?

Privileged Tactics is the name of a series of projects that focus on *how people use creativity to survive*. Arising from our research, Privileged Tactics presents models for specific situations that question the wider environment, and at the same time help people improve their situation.

*The projects suggest ways of subverting and appropriating tactics usually reserved for the privileged in order to survive.*

*Privileged Tactics I* was based on our experiences with street children in the Ukraine. Before the arrival of capitalism to the former Soviet country, street kids didn’t exist, but now number in the hundreds of thousands. The project consisted of an audio installation giving instructions for stealing; and a bag that can be used to block security alarms in shops.

The project tried to ask, *when is stealing a criminal tactic – and when is it a legal, or privileged tactic.*

*Privileged Tactics III* asks how people from different religious, national, ethnic, linguistic and geographic situations can use creativity in their interpersonal relationships. *It presents models that raise questions about an increasingly diverse society* and about the ways that technology mediates our relationships.

Privileged Tactics II - Background

**The Zaballeen**

In 2006 we visited Cairo and the hills of Moqattam, where we were first introduced to the Zaballeen (“people who collect the rubbish”). This community of *70,000 people survive by collecting and recycling the city’s rubbish* in family-run cottage industries. We learnt that they recycle between 80-90% of all the waste they collect. (To compare, in London, only 40% of the rubbish collected for recycling is actually recycled.)

But despite international recognition for their low-impact and low-energy techniques, *their livelihood is threatened* by both international garbage contractors and government plans to move the Zaballeen out of the city. The international sanitation companies dump most of the rubbish they collect in land-fill sites in the desert.

**First Idea**

Our original idea was a GPS digital mapping project – we would track 1000 bottles as they moved around Cairo, and create a map showing how many ended up in the Zaballeen plants and how may in landfill sites. The idea won second prize in the 2007 UNESCO Digital Arts Awards.
Central Cairo

Recycling plastic in Moqattam, where 70,000 Zaballeen survive by recycling Cairo's waste
GPS vs RFID

After further research into GPS (Global Positioning System) we decided it wasn’t feasible to use this technology as it is too large and expensive, and require a battery to transmit its position. However RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology produces tags that are so small they can be hidden on any object. Products, animals and people can be identified and tracked using radio waves.

Personal Responsibility

Also, we realised that the Zaballeen model was not viable in the West, but could be implemented in other huge cities in the developing world. The project then divided into two aims:

1) To **promote the Zaballeen model** for environmental sustainability.
2) To present a model for the West based on **increasing personal responsibility for the environment**.

New Model

Privileged Tactics II is a series of artistic interventions, exhibitions, round-tables, and a website that tackle the theme of environmental sustainability. It takes as a starting point the Zaballeen. The project uses emergent technology as a way to increase awareness and to create models for individuals to take greater responsibility for the environment.

In a public place in Cairo, bottles of water are given away. The bottles are discreetly tagged with RFID. RFID readers are placed at the entrances to the Zaballeen’s recycling plants. Information collected about the tracked bottles acts as a starting point for raising awareness about the Zaballeen and future development for the project.

The actions are adapted for Western cities. Today consumers make decisions based on a wide range of complex factors including quality, design and price. The proposed model encourages consumers to choose products based on a further consideration: its environmental impact.

**Using RFID technology, consumers can scan products and access information about the environmental impact of a product**, such as:
- its carbon footprint (CO2 production)
- other waste/pollution produced
- how far it travelled to reach the place of purchase
- what percentage of recycled products are used in the manufacturing process
- how this product will be disposed of/recycled
- the environmental policy of the manufacturer

**A travelling exhibition will present the models through actions in the public space, video, RFID installation, maps, workshops and website.**
Future

The first demonstration of the model takes place in September 2008 at the Schute [Maknete] gallery in Hamburg, Germany.

On the 1st of October 2008 we will travel to Cairo for a research trip to develop the project further.

Partners and supporters

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The Brindle Foundation, US

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