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## WANDERING EYE

# Terrorism and circuses

**YONGE-DUNDAS SQUARE** -- There are not many places where a crumpled, smouldering car wreck can be upstaged, but on the evening of June 9, it's happening. Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable (Socially Acceptable Terrorist Action, or ATSA) is in town to stage a mock car bombing and criticize sport-utility vehicles. Set up in the northwest corner of the square, the art installation even smells right, thanks to a fume machine burning vegetable oil. Blasting horns from the cars idling in rush-hour traffic provide the right soundtrack. It's even a smog day. But most of the people in Dundas Square are watching a nearby busker, especially now that he's standing on a 10-foot ladder, juggling knives.

Annie Roy, one of the ATSA founders, loiters near the site of her responsibly bombed car.

"For me they're kind of a symbol of arrogance, opulence," she says of SUVs. "They reflect a big paranoia. Our neighbours to the south are making the world feel like everything is so dangerous. You have to be high in the car, big, to feel secure." ATSA's pamphlet states unequivocally that oil kills, highlighting the war in Iraq and global warming, and listing 75 relevant websites.



Friendly terrorism in Dundas Square.

As the juggler wraps up and asks for donations to feed his 50 children, some of his audience wanders over to ATSA's installation. Most stand in silence, watching the TV inside the wreck looping ATSA's manifesto ("Because the only useful SUV is a dead SUV," "Before violence breaks out in the street, here are our demands") over images of George W. Bush and the World Trade Center. One man tells another, apparently defending the car industry, that he lives 30km from work.

"You just don't have a choice," he says, before walking off. Over their heads, an advertising screen displays car ads.

A man on a bike says he just rode down from Bayview and Sheppard. But he's not just a cyclist.

"Well, I have an SUV, and I don't get it," he says, surveying ATSA's demonstration. "I love my SUV. It's actually a 4x4 pickup. It's just big."

ATSA has been staging actions since 1997, including planting 2000 crocus bulbs in an abandoned lot, building an archeological site out of garbage and setting up an annual "urban refugee camp" in downtown Montreal. This is their first project outside of Quebec, presented with Toronto's Theatre Centre.

At their table, ATSA members distribute flyers and souvenirs. Burned matchbox cars on keychains are for sale, and tiny replicas of the bombed SUV are packaged like children's toys.

Tomorrow, Roy says, they are going to draw a physical link between the bombed SUV and the US

Consulate with red chalk. In a few days, they will move their terrorist attack to Ottawa. In the meantime, bystanders stroll away, weighed down by their shopping bags. **ALLISON MARTELL**

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## BACK-ALLEY BEAUTY

**TRINITY-BELLWOODS** -- Zen gardens, lush greenery, modern structures and an art gallery. Not things you'd expect to find in Toronto's laneways, but they're there -- you just have to know where to look.

On June 12, an overcast day, cartographer Graeme Parry starts the first Toronto Laneway Bike Tour of the year. "The sounds of the city recede into the background in these laneways and you can almost forget you're in a city," he says. The views vary: "Some are what you'd expect, just garages. But sometimes you come across something unexpected, like an old coach house or a converted warehouse that from the front looks so small but at the back opens out into something amazing."



Laneway tours reveal the unseen city.

Parry says he's lived in Toronto for 10 years and has always been fascinated by the hidden network of laneways in the city, but it wasn't until 2003 that he started to photograph and record interesting sites that he found. In 2004, he started leading tours on bicycle so that others could share his fascination.

The tour today follows a horseshoe-shaped route. It goes from Trinity-Bellwoods Park to just south of Harbord, where, among the usual laneway sights of garbage and garages, are quirky old coach houses and family homes hidden behind beat-up wooden doors. In Little Italy, a serene Zen garden is tucked away beside a modern house unexpectedly located on the lane. There's a vast family home that incorporates old garages into its structure behind a bakery in Kensington Market; the amount of greenery and decoration is surprising. After cycling past the graffiti murals that line the alleys behind Queen West, the tour ends at Spadina.

Just three people are on the tour today, with the heat and threat of rain obviously putting some off, but normally tours attract between six and 10. Bruce McKay, who's lived in Toronto for 30 years, has come along to find out more about his city. As the ride comes to an end, he says, "I love seeing the hundred-year-old houses with the new ones right beside them. I wonder who lives in those places." Parry shares his curiosity, and has recently tried to contact some of the structures' owners to find out more about the history of the buildings and their tenants. So far he's had no responses, but he remains hopeful.

"Laneing," as Parry calls it, shows people a whole other side of Toronto, one that is bigger than you may expect. "There's real potential for laneways to absorb the expected population growth in this city," he says. He's not the first to have this thought: architects Terence Van Elslander and Jeffery Stinson have been investigating laneway housing construction as a possibility for Toronto.

Graeme describes laneing as a "mini-vacation" because at the end of the tour, when you emerge from oddly peaceful and secluded streets onto a main road, the city somehow looks different. It's hard to believe that some of these places exist so close to all the activity of the main streets.

The next Laneway Bike Tour is scheduled for June 26 at 11am. For more information, see [www.graemeparry.com/laneways](http://www.graemeparry.com/laneways). **PHOEBE SMITH**

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## BUILDING A BIKE HIGHWAY

**DUNDAS WEST AND BLOOR** -- A young man shuffles through the muggy air in the Bishop Morrocco/Thomas Merton school auditorium. An avid cyclist, he's handing out pamphlets calling for a Bloor Street bike lane stretching from High Park to Sherbourne. Someone else -- presumably another cyclist -- speaks loudly against car-loving suburbanites bent on destroying his way of life. Some people pull out notepads; others peruse information they've accumulated on the way in.

This is a June 8 public meeting hosted by the Friends of the West Toronto Railpath (FOWTR), a volunteer group dedicated to helping the city realize plans for an ambitious 6.5km corridor stretching from Dupont to King, where it will connect with the Wellington bike lane.

"This is much more than a bicycle route," says FOWTR organizer Stewart Chisholm. "It's the future of our cities." Green infrastructure, he says, is as crucial to cities as bridges or sewers.

Although it's part of the Toronto Bike Plan, the Railpath isn't solely a bikers' initiative. Richard McAvan, a landscape architect with Harrington and Hoyle, is a partner in this arrangement. He walks us through an inspired plan that aims to involve public art, community gardening, neighbourhood integration and a smattering of miniature parks doubling as points of entry. Designers hope some 200,000 people will use it regularly -- enough, they say, to help Toronto reach some of its Kyoto Protocol goals.

The city is almost ready to move on the northern half of the Railpath. The designated land, which bears industrial scars typical of a rail yard, was purchased from CP Rail in 2003; this year's capital budget earmarked half-a-million dollars for development, and it could be ready by 2006.

The southern section is still on the drawing board. Property ownership is not as clear as up north, and an environmental assessment is still in the works. But time is scarce, says a community member, and condo developers are already sucking fat out of that land.

More important, says a woman named Sally, is her dog. "We're out there rain or shine. Our dogs have to walk." She knows such a popular public place will call for a leash on her Fido. "That's a real shame," she says sadly.

More questions emerge: queries on the interface between the Railpath and sidewalks, on security within its confines, on costs and timelines. It's clear that this is a fledgling enterprise. Nothing is set in stone. Quite the opposite: all processes, especially regarding design, are deliberately organic, and FOWTR is expecting community input.

"There will be a further level of detailed design," says city planner Alex Shevchuk. "And there will be public involvement." [PAUL CARLUCCI](#)