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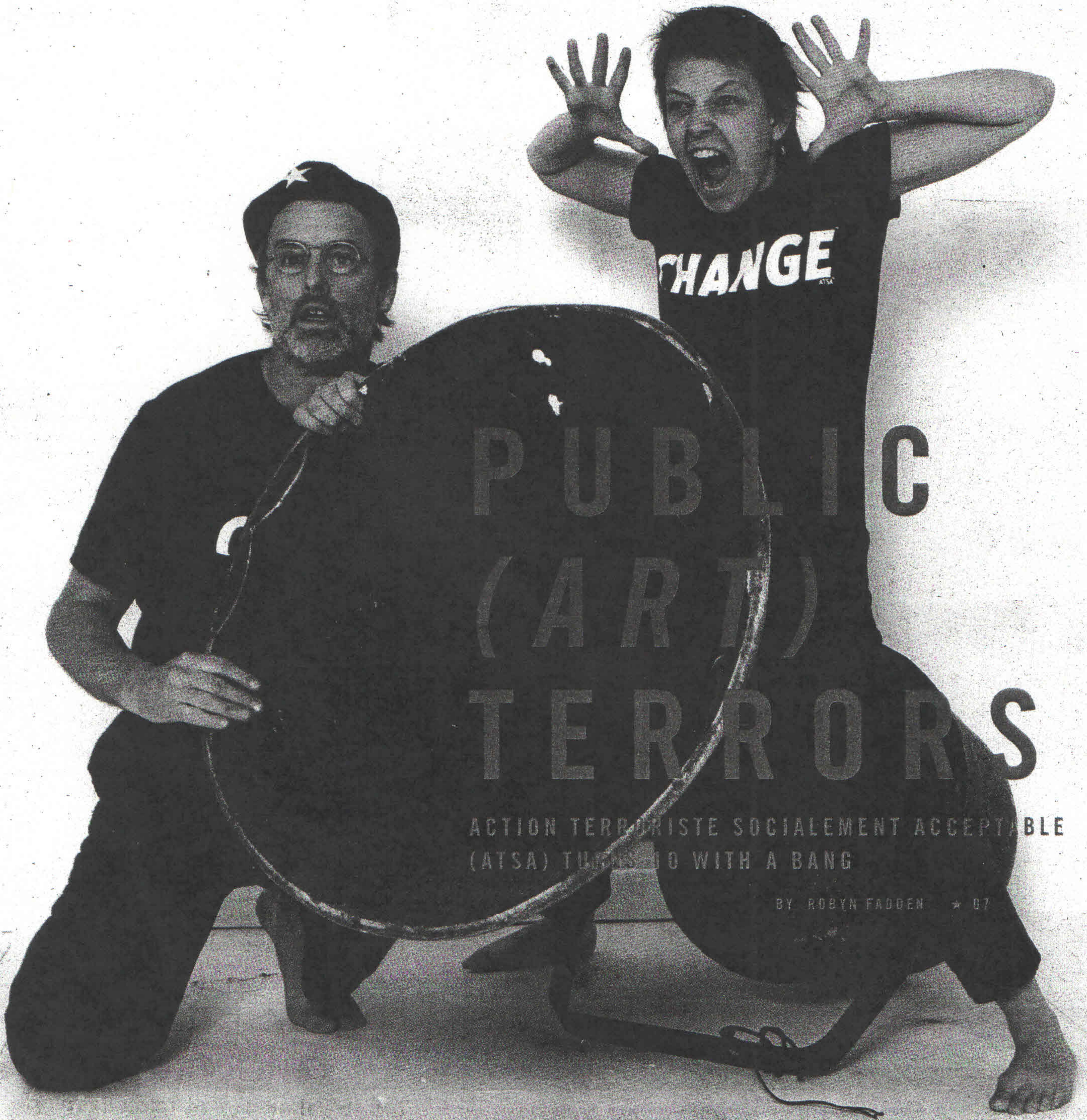


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## PUBLIC (ART) TERRORS

ACTION TERRORISTE SOCIALEMENT ACCEPTABLE  
(ATSA) TURNS UP WITH A BANG

BY ROBYN FADDEN ★ 07

(MONTREAL HOUR) VOL: NO 16:40 / OCTOBER 2 TO 8, 2008



## YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE, OR NOT-PLEASE

Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable (ATSA) celebrates 10 years of art activism

by Robyn Fadden

When you walk down the street in Montreal, people look you in the eye. Sometimes this acknowledgement is unwanted, but most of the time it's just that: acknowledgement. The art and social activism group Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable (ATSA) looks at

these common public encounters in a different way: as catalysts for change.

Ten years ago, ATSA began creating very public "urban interventions" that connected art, activism and everyday life. In the year of Quebec's devastating ice storm, dancer/choreographer Annie Roy

and visual artist Pierre Allard decided to create a public piece of "terrorist art" in front of the Musée d'Art Contemporain on Ste-Catherine Street.

To bring attention to the widening gap between rich and poor, they gathered donations of socks and gas stoves—the doors of the stoves acted like bank machines, dispensing a much-needed currency of warm socks from December through February. Roy and Allard's interactive art, called *State of Emergency* (*État d'urgence*), brought together diverse groups of people with a shared sense of urgency that the state of the world needed to change.

"Change is one of the concepts that ATSA was founded on," says Roy. "It's part of the way we make art, and the way our art appears in the street has to have a symbolism that everyone can understand."

Laure Waridel, sociologist and co-founder of Équiterre, a Montreal-based organization dedicated to environmental sustainability, fair trade and ecological consumption, says she got involved with ATSA because "they mix rigorous information with deeper feelings to get a reflective reaction... The strength of Annie and Pierre is their ability to reach different kinds of people at the same time."

This week ATSA celebrates its 10-year anniversary with a new project: a retail store called Change on busy St-Laurent Blvd. Both art project and business, the store immerses the non-profit art organization into the world of economics and marketing. It will sell art and be art—a showcase for ATSA's past activities and a new perspective on the issues they've investigated: wealth distribution, consumerism, heritage protection, fossil fuel consumption, globalization and others.

Ultimately, the project is a paradox, "a critique of the ubiquity of marketing, but also a commercial space for encounter and discussion in order to further the development of a responsible citizenry," says Roy. "The store is part of dealing with our value systems."

### CHANGE IN THE STREETS OF MONTREAL

Using the word "terrorism" these days attracts attention, but ATSA hasn't experienced many negative repercussions. "It's a conceptualized terrorism, where art is like a bomb in a public space," says Roy. "The art is going to provoke a debate; the 'socially acceptable' part of it is that the violence is in the symbolic. We don't do actual violence and there is no secret to us—we want to be discovered."

When Bush declared war on Iraq, he used the word "terrorism" to inspire fear and insulation. ATSA wanted to take their name back as a show of freedom of expression. The *Attentat* (*Attack*) project parked a bombed-out, still-fuming opulent SUV in the middle of the city, with a TV inside blaring a manifesto on the environmental impact of the oil and gas industry. "We're all guilty and we should all do something about it. We had to discuss this subject with people in public so that it would relate to their lives," says Roy.

In addition to the public spectacle component of *Attentat*, ATSA volunteer "officers" gave out 10,000 tickets that resembled City of Montreal tickets. It turned out to be effective, eliciting responses ranging from angry to curious to reflective, and gained so much attention that people from across the country still print the tickets from the ATSA website and distribute them. "It's not like doing this one time will always make a difference, but repeating it might make a difference. This project was a way for people to interact and exchange different ideas in the street," says Roy. "Changing mentality has a lot to do with how you are perceived by others—the car means status to some, but to others it doesn't. In showing people this, it made some question their choices."

ATSA's history of public art—laid out in detail on their website ([www.atsa.qc.ca](http://www.atsa.qc.ca)) and in their new anniversary publication, *ATSA: Quand l'art passe à l'action*—culminates now in the Change store project. "It is a concrete way to show what ATSA's done, and it's very important for us to have this mercantile aspect to the project as well as show how economic exchange can be more than that," Roy explains. "People will discuss what they're going to buy as part of the economic exchange, and each time someone buys something they leave with a part of our message, tell it to their friends when they're explaining the object—maybe it's going to generate more discussion among more and more people."

### ATSA'S BIG 10

#### CHANGE STORE OPENING AND PUBLICATION LAUNCH

Thursday, Oct. 2, 2008, at 6 p.m.  
4351 St-Laurent Blvd.

With a trade fair at Parc du Portugal (corner St-Laurent/Marie-Anne)

Change opens its doors to the general public with a grand opening that is also a liquidation sale—and a party—with new works based on ATSA's collection of objects, artifacts and archive photos, as well as a line of message-based tie-in merchandise.

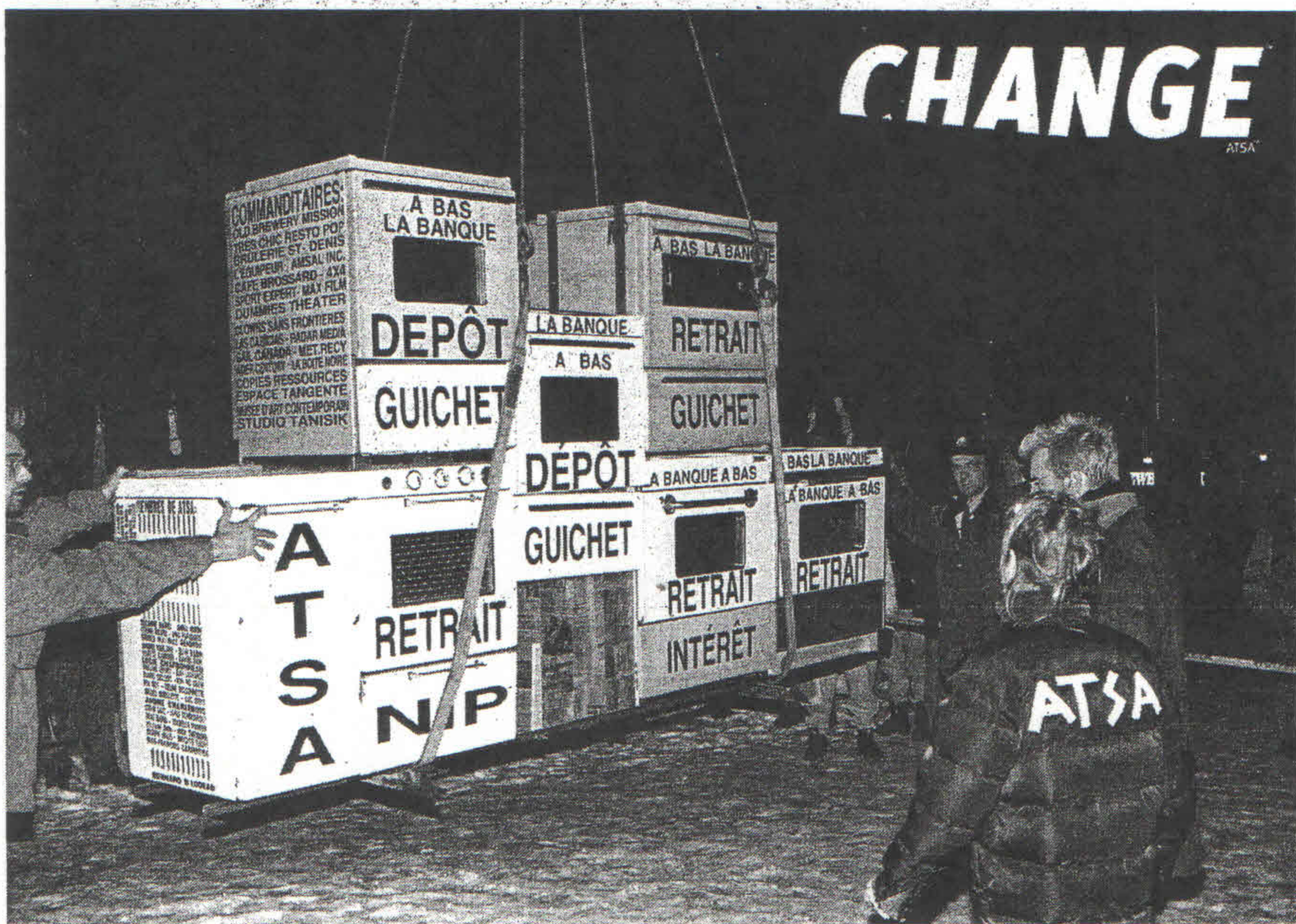
"One of the purposes of the store is to enter a conversation and exchange—people change when they feel emotion and a direct relationship to the subject. It's important that people have a person-to-person connection—our artistic concepts are important, but this connection is what really causes change," says ATSA co-founder Annie Roy.

The store, like all of ATSA's projects, is considered a work in progress: visitors won't be treated the same way as they would be in a normal store—they'll throw their loose change on the floor to create a "financial base," take off their shoes and walk on it, the change remaining as a trace of their visit. A museum guide will answer questions and show visitors through the exhibit. Fridays will feature "art encounters" and Thursdays will see cinema in the park. "We also want to play with money too—it's not rigid like most stores," says Roy.

The temporary retail space and art project will remain open from Oct. 2 to Dec. 20, 2008.

#### ATSA's anniversary publication, *ATSA: Quand l'art passe à l'action* (*When Art Takes Action*), available at the store opening; in limited quantities, features 144 pages of graphics and text covering the history of the activist art organization. The publication brings together commentary and critique from a cross-section of Montreal's politically active community, including Sami Aoun (political scientist), Patrick Beaudouin (marketing expert), Dinu Bumbaru (Héritage Montréal), Guy Sioui Durand (art sociologist), Steven Guilbeault (Équiterre spokesperson), Louis Hamelin (Writer), Louis Jacob (art historian), Jean Lemire (filmmaker and biologist) and Laure Waridel (sociologist and Équiterre co-founder).

Annual activism: 10 years of *State of Emergency/État d'urgence*  
Nov. 26 to 30, 2008, at Place Émilie-Gamelin, Montreal  
A multidisciplinary art "manifesto" with the look and feel of a refugee camp in the middle of Montreal's downtown core, *State of Emergency* brings people together to take a closer look at social exclusion and break down stereotypes of poverty. Among other things, it provides street people with three meals a day, a snack at any time, donations of warm clothing, sleep accommodations for 150 people and numerous other front-line services. Awarded the Prix citoyen de la culture by *Arts et la Ville*, *State of Emergency* will also bring together more than 60 artists to create an environment that provokes thought on the human condition and social cohesion. Here, art acts as the engine of democracy, encouraging harmonious coexistence of citizens in urban centres and blending social solidarity with creative expression. (Robyn Fadden) (C)



HEAT AS CURRENCY IN ATSA'S STATE OF EMERGENCY

photo Luc Senecal



ATTENTAT (ATTACK) ON THE INDUSTRIES OF OIL AND WAR

photo Martin Savoie