



# The art of provocation

By TOM MASHBERG

## 'Guerrilla' actions deliver social message

They gathered after dark in a seedy Somerville warehouse to lay out their mission, street maps of Boston and environs spread before them, platoons of eager volunteers awaiting the sign to move out quietly in twos and threes.

First, the quadrants and sectors were assigned. Then, the inflammatory ammunition was parceled out. Finally, it was zero hour. The guerrillas hit and hit hard at the enemy transports. Striking at will, they recorded numerous kills. Before dawn, the deed was done.

Several hundred gas-guzzling, street-hogging SUVs had been blitzed with orange leaflets mimicking the familiar rectangular shape and obnoxious fluorescent coloration of a \$15 parking ticket.

And, in the view of the artist-activists, thousands of complacent, self-satisfied yuppies had been reminded their bloated off-road fantasy vehicles are in fact the fuel-swilling, sideswiping "big scary trucks" of suburban living.

"We were pushing buttons for sure, but with humor," said John Tagiuri, 46, a successful public artist and one of three Somervillians behind the "guerrilla art" stunt, with Mira Friedlaender, 29, a graphics artist, and Mike Flanigan, 36, a bicycle builder. "A good public-art action reflects on society and provokes a reaction, but with information, not violence."

"While the term 'guerrilla art' is anchored in the language of war," said Friedman, "not all examples are intended to attack. Many such projects are designed to provoke or challenge what the artist sees as a complacent public. Others are simply openings to inquiry."

As currently construed, experts say, much modern guerrilla art seems aimed at puncturing latter-day bourgeois values, or challenging the "manufactured consensus" surrounding policies like narcotics control or energy usage.

Such was the goal of the three artists behind the SUV ticketing project, which they say is slated soon to go national. The tickets are designed as mailers that can be sent to politicians, and include

information like the fact that SUVs are exempt from federal fuel-efficiency standards, and often average less than 13 miles per gallon.

The tickets have a prompt effect, Tagiuri, Friedlaender and Flanigan said, ranging from media calls to applause from bikers to bitter e-mails from uncontrite leadfoots to inquiries from drivers about which car choices might be better than big sport utility vehicles.

"There is something so satisfying about plotting it out, handing out the maps, doing it by surprise, having the tickets appear like the Easter Bunny the next day," said Tagiuri. "It was nonviolent. It was not just three kooks. It was a performance with a lot of people."