

Squeegee **P**unks **I**n **T**raffic

a film by Daniel Cross

**“This rocks with the urgency of youth and the wounded
anger of the wrongfully accused”** **“★★★★”**
- Montreal Gazette

www.spit.ca

Squeegee Punks In Traffic

Internationally acclaimed director Daniel Cross (**The Street: a film with the homeless**) presents a gutter-level view of a squeegee punk living on the streets of Toronto and Montreal. **SPIT: Squeegee Punks in Traffic** follows Roach, a 17-year-old ex-junkie, through the conservative hell unleashed by the Common-Sense Revolution. Cross gives Roach a camera (the RoachCAM) to document his life.

Over the next 3 years, we see Roach make a journey from street punk to aspiring filmmaker. The film documents Roach while he slowly stabilizes his life, and develops a politicized style of filmmaking.

S.P.I.T. is a punk-verité feature that changes all the rules. **SPIT: Squeegee Punks in Traffic** smashes the windshield between US and THEM. Roach's camera acts as the hammer: hard, forceful, direct, impacting with the force of an actual life. Daniel Cross' camera documents the impact: recording the reflections of individual lives, mirrored upon the shards of flying glass. These kids refuse to obey, assimilate or conform to societal values. Their beliefs and realities are scarred into their flesh in the forms of piercings, tattoos and bruised veins. **S.P.I.T.** is a harsh, unflinching film following Roach's odyssey through the battles of his hardcore generation.



The SPIT Army is invading Toronto!

Currently on a cross-Canada rampage, **SPIT** was launched in Montréal (9 weeks in cinemas) continued across Canada: Quebec City, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver and around the world U.S., France, Spain, Sweden and Australia.

S.P.I.T. will be making its Toronto debut opening May 23 at Carlton Theatre.

Directors Daniel Cross and Roach will be in Toronto starting MAY 15th and available for interviews they will also be in attendance for Q and A sessions after each screening. Filmmakers Roach (Eric Denis) and Daniel Cross can be contacted at (514) 707-4893

Please Contact: Press agent Ryan Bruce

Office/Fax (416) 703-5880 voicemail (416) 330-5506
vagrantfilms@go.com

Press screening: Thursday, May 15th 10:00am

Varsity Cinemas, VIP Cinema #3, 55 Bloor St. West
(Manulife Centre)



Production Details: Canada, 80 min, 35mm, colour, Original English/French (w/ subtitles)
Directed by Daniel Cross

High resolution press photos available at: www.spit.ca/press

MEANS of PRODUCTION

S.P.I.T. was made over a period of over 3 years (over 300 hours of raw footage). From street level, we worked with hundreds of squeegee kids, punks and anarchists. Together, we filmed cops, politicians, demonstrations, arrests, parties and riots. We edited for over a year and blew up the results to 35 mm film for theatrical release. The film contains two competing points-of-view: filmmaker and subject. Roach was given a video camera (the RoachCAM) to document his life. Immediate, honest and direct, the anarcho-punk energy in this film comes directly from Roach's lens.

The RoachCAM

Our guide and co-contributor in this film is a young man named Roach. At age 13, he ran away from a youth detention centre and began a cycle of living in parks, abandoned cars, homeless shelters, and jail. He faces arrest because of thousands of dollars in unpaid squeegee tickets and has contracted Hepatitis C from intravenous drug use.

The first time I met Roach he was squeegeeing at one of Montreal's busiest intersections, at St. Catherine and St. Denis. I was impressed by his work ethic: smiling and bounding from car to car, "can I clean your window, spare any change?" a quick scrub of the windshield, headlights, collect the change and get back to the curb, already looking for the next set of cars.

After talking with Roach I realised he was a unique individual. He's respected on the streets and knows everyone: kids, cops, drug dealers, social workers. Given the RoachCAM to document his world, Roach immediately recognised the opportunity and began negotiations expressing his own ideas and goals: "I want to show people that we're not garbage", he said.

For over 2 years Roach has taken his camera everywhere: political events like the Queen's Park Throne Speech, the Allan Gardens Occupation, in search for housing, anarchist gatherings, film festivals, hitchhiking, punk rock shows, funerals, movie theatres, and every type of strange nocturnal adventure you can imagine. The camera has become a part of him. "Captain Hook has his hook; I have my camera", says Roach.

Roach has taken it upon himself to provide a detailed view of a lifestyle that most people only observe through their windshields while stopped at red lights. He has jumped at the opportunity to learn filmmaking, while maintaining his sense of responsibility to those around him. His images are direct, honest, naïve and energetic. He has created his own instinctual cinematic language: his camera is a diary, a tool to confront authority figures, and an opportunity to creatively denounce a political system he opposes. In the process, we see Roach transform from street junkie to media activist.

It is my hope that **S.P.I.T.**, like my earlier film *The Street*, will begin an honest and open dialogue, breaking down the fears and the stereotypes that are making a generation of Canadians into enemies of the state. Many of our friends were killed during the making of **S.P.I.T.** We dedicate this film in memory of: Bass-Pascal, Melika Broukhis, Dany Brunet, Heidi (Dragon), Pierre Imbeault (Rambo), Israël, Mélanie Lord, Steve Mohawk, Richard Beaulieu (Self Control, Deadly Pale). RIP.



Director Daniel Cross

The SQUEEGEE War

This conflict has been brewing through two decades of dismantling Canada's social safety net. The numbers of youth living in poverty are rising faster than for any other age group, and kids are turning to the streets to survive. In the process of making S.P.I.T. we spent many days and nights with kids living in shelters or squatting amidst the industrial ruin and car exhaust beneath the Gardiner Expressway, sleeping on concrete ledges, beneath four lanes of roaring traffic.

According to the punks, the War started when Toronto cops swooped in and arrested 19 squeegee kids in one day, near the Queen and Spadina intersection. This was the beginning of a \$1.9 million police campaign to "cleanse" the Toronto downtown core of undesirables. Kids were routinely harassed, ticketed, put in jail. Zero tolerance target policing became the solution to "aggressive" begging:



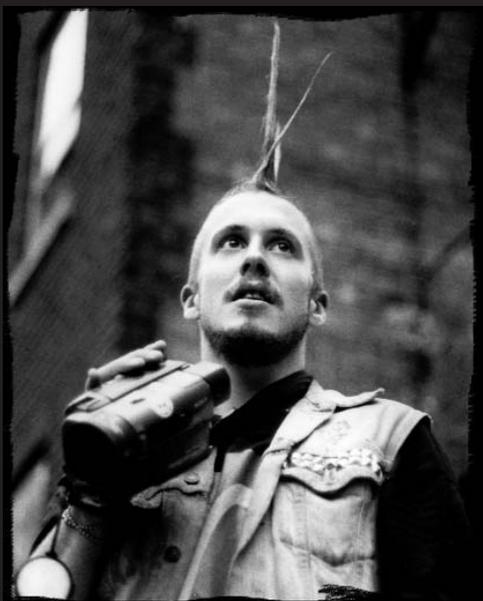
"It's unfortunate the way their lifestyles are, but you've got to consider the taxpaying business people...and the people who are trying to enjoy the area. [merchants] are losing business, customers are afraid to come in and out of the store."

Toronto Police Detective—Constable Shawn Elliott

According to the politicians, the War started with a series of press conferences, all designed to inform the public that squeegeeing will not be tolerated. The Conservative government of Ontario went as far to say, "homelessness will be declared illegal". Mayor Mel Lastman declared the homeless situation in Toronto a "national disaster", demanding federal funding to help build emergency shelters. He has kept up his attacks on squeegee kids:

"We are going to get them off the streets. Many of them are thugs... All they're doing is intimidating people into giving them money. They're beggars, and that's all they are . . . The police are going to do everything they have to to get them off the streets".

Mel Lastman



The battles have been fought on all fronts: angry demonstrations through the streets, occupations of parks, riots at City Hall and Queen's Park, mass squeegeeing, and court battles over squeegee tickets. In Ottawa, Squeegee kids in solidarity with poor people from across Canada marched on Parliament Hill. They wanted to speak to their government, in order to demand an end to systematic police crackdowns against the homeless. The protest was met with riot cops and attack dogs. *I am standing under a literal pillar of democracy—the peace tower—when I get my first taste of pepper spray. It's the first time ever that pepper spray is used on Parliament Hill. The War continues...*

Who Are **SQUEEGEE PUNKS**?

- They are your neighbors, friends, brothers, sisters or children. They pour into the big cities year-round to look for freedom and security on the streets. They find neither.
- Kids end up homeless for many reasons: Escaping from abuse and neglect, a broken home, or youth detention. On the streets they learn how to survive, find money and shelter, use drugs, turn tricks, and avoid the police.
- There are thousands of homeless kids on the streets: Missing Children of Canada estimates there may be 50,000 children on the streets of Canada. Children under 21 are the fastest-growing demographic of street people.
- Most North American cities have banned squeegeeing (and many have banned begging). Kids accumulate thousands of dollars worth of fines and then go to jail, deepening the cycle of poverty.
- Street youth are one of the highest at-risk groups for HIV, Hepatitis C, tuberculosis, STD's, drug overdose and many other health problems. They rely on a complex network of friends, shelters and aid workers to survive.

SQUEEGEE PUNKS are forced to question the establishment in a way that only the disenfranchised can, providing a view of a world most don't see: cops on horseback storming parks at dawn, beatings in back alleys, imprisonment for months by mistaken identity because punks all dress the same and they're hard to tell apart.

They have become nomads—owning almost nothing, never knowing stability, living an alien existence. *No sleeping in this park. Don't squeegee in front of my store. You're not allowed in this part of town. If you're still here when we come back, we'll arrest you.*

These kids refuse to obey, assimilate, or conform to society's values—their beliefs and realities are scarred into their flesh in the form of piercings, tattoos, track marks, bruised veins, rotting teeth, gangrene, scurvy...

We made this film because these kids have something vital to say, with their Words (Corruption... Riot ... Anarchy) with their Actions (storming Parliament to speak to their government), with their Attitude (stepping into traffic and announcing their poverty).

It is my hope that we try and understand this rebellion and lifestyle. Before we run them out of town, put them in jail, discipline them, destroy them.

We can't hope for a healthy society based on Zero Tolerance policies that criminalize those who are young and poor and rebellious: it is absolutely necessary for a democracy to listen to the critical voices of youth. People are scared of squeegee kids because they're different, and new laws are constantly being introduced across the country which allow police to target and arrest them. These laws are killing a rite of passage into adulthood in which young people are allowed to rebel and question the establishment. With this film we hope to break down the fears and stereotypes that are turning a generation of Canadian kids into enemies of the state.



The SPIT army

Daniel Cross

Director/Producer

S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks In Traffic is the third film in the Cross oeuvre of cinema-verité street films that started with **Danny Boy** (1989) and then **The Street: a film with the homeless** (1998). With theatrical distribution and festival awards, the voices of these films have now been heard around the world. In 2001, Daniel also completed the Gemini Award nominated **Too Colourful For The League**, about the legacy of black hockey players in the NHL. Cross is now creating the www.homelessarchive.org, a huge Internet archive of interactive homeless voices. He is co-owner of Eye Steel Film, a production company dedicated to activist film and web projects. He also teaches film production at Concordia University in Montreal.

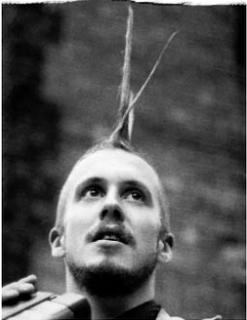
daniel@eyesteelfilm.com



Mila Aung-Thwin & Daniel Cross

Roach

Camera Punk/Assistant Director



At the age of 14, Roach (Eric Denis) ran away from a youth detention centre and lived for 6 years in parks, abandoned cars, homeless shelters, and jail. He faces arrest because of thousands dollars in unpaid squeegee tickets. Roach began to document his reality with a hi-8 camera, the RoachCAM, and then graduated on to the DigiRoachCAM, since then he has learned sound recording, editing and directing. He now has an apartment but is still a hardcore punk: today he is finishing his own film, **Le Voyage de L'espoir**, an all-out punk hangover of a road movie, documenting a bizarre journey from the FTAA riots in Quebec City to the orchards of Okanagan Valley, B.C. roach@eyesteelfilm.com

Mila Aung-Thwin

Cinematographer/Producer

Mila Aung-Thwin is co-owner of EyeSteelFilm in Montreal. He co-directed the **Gemini nominated Too Colourful For The League** with Daniel Cross. Current projects include a film about life under the Gardiner Expressway in Toronto, an NFB documentary about subway musicians in Montreal, and a project teaching documentary film techniques to Inuit teenagers in Nunavik.

mila@eyesteelfilm.com

Pascal Maeder

Producer

Head of ATOPIA, Pascal Maeder studied film production at Concordia University in the mid-eighties. In the nineties, along with the feature film Motel, which he produced and directed in 1993, Maeder has produced and designed six original plays with Dummies Theatre, a company that he co-founded in 1992. In 1999, he produced the futuristic film, Between the Moon and Montevideo, along with writer-director Attila Bertalan. In 2000, he founded ATOPIA through which he produced the feature documentary, SPIT: Squeegee Punks In Traffic, directed by Daniel Cross and released for nine consecutive weeks in Montréal and Vancouver. More recently, Maeder produced Federico Hidalgo's A Silent Love shot in Montreal and Mexico as well as El Ring, presented at the FCMM and the Havana Film Festival.

PRESS

"This rocks with the urgency of youth and the wounded anger of the wrongfully accused. 4 stars" - **Montreal Gazette, October 12 2001**

"A very real, very thorough - even masterful - portrait of the life of a street punk named Roach" - **Ian Brown, TVOntario The View From Here**

"You gotta see this film"
- **Vicki Gabereau, The Vicki Gabereau Show, March 4th**

"Roach is a natural to present the case of the maligned street people who make a dollar dodging traffic and the law"
The Vancouver Sun, March 7, 2003

"Cross brought great sensitivity and intelligence to his previous work on the underprivileged, in such films as Danny Boy and The Street. Again, here, he has proven a vital advocate for the disenfranchised."
- **Montreal Mirror, Oct 11 2001**

"S.P.I.T. will actually alter the way you look at those rag-bag kids who approach your car with dripping wiper in hand."
The Georgia Straight, Mar.6 2003

"...as intense and chaotic as life on the streets itself...SPIT achieves a rare feat by neither romanticizing nor demonizing life as a squeegee punk."
Lansing State Journal (Michigan), March 22 2003

Shooting the generation

MATT RADZ
The Gazette

The pig's knuckles at the Dominion Pub are a culinary landmark. For about five bucks you get a plate piled high with fatty pink meat cooked so it's falling off the bone.

No extra charge for the hot mustard. And yes, there is a potato and it's boiled to perfection. Even with a pint or two to wash it down, the portion is formidable.

Roach is packing it away.
He's mopped up his own plate with the gusto of a hungry 19-year-old and is scooping the leftovers into a white plastic doggie bag.

Toutoune, his pet dog and the one thing in his life Roach can count on, is about to have puppies.

She can use the extra nourishment.
Roach has been on the street since age 13. By the time he was 16, he'd traveled and squeegeed around New York City, Detroit and Philadelphia and all over Ontario and Quebec. He's battling a drug addiction; he shoots cocaine.

His cough is loud, persistent and alarming.

Roach is the associate director of a new film by Montreal director Daniel Cross about the emerging subculture of revolting street youth, stereotyped by the media as "squeegee punks."

Subtitled A Film About Youth, Dreams and Intolerance, the project carried the working title Squeegee Kids when shooting began. After several months with the young homeless in the avenues, alleyways and in Place Pasteur, the title has been changed to *Discrimination*.

Please see **GAP, Page D3**

Take a homeless street kid named Roach.
Give him a Hi8 camera and let him roam
Montreal, documenting life on the streets.
A film to smash through the windshield



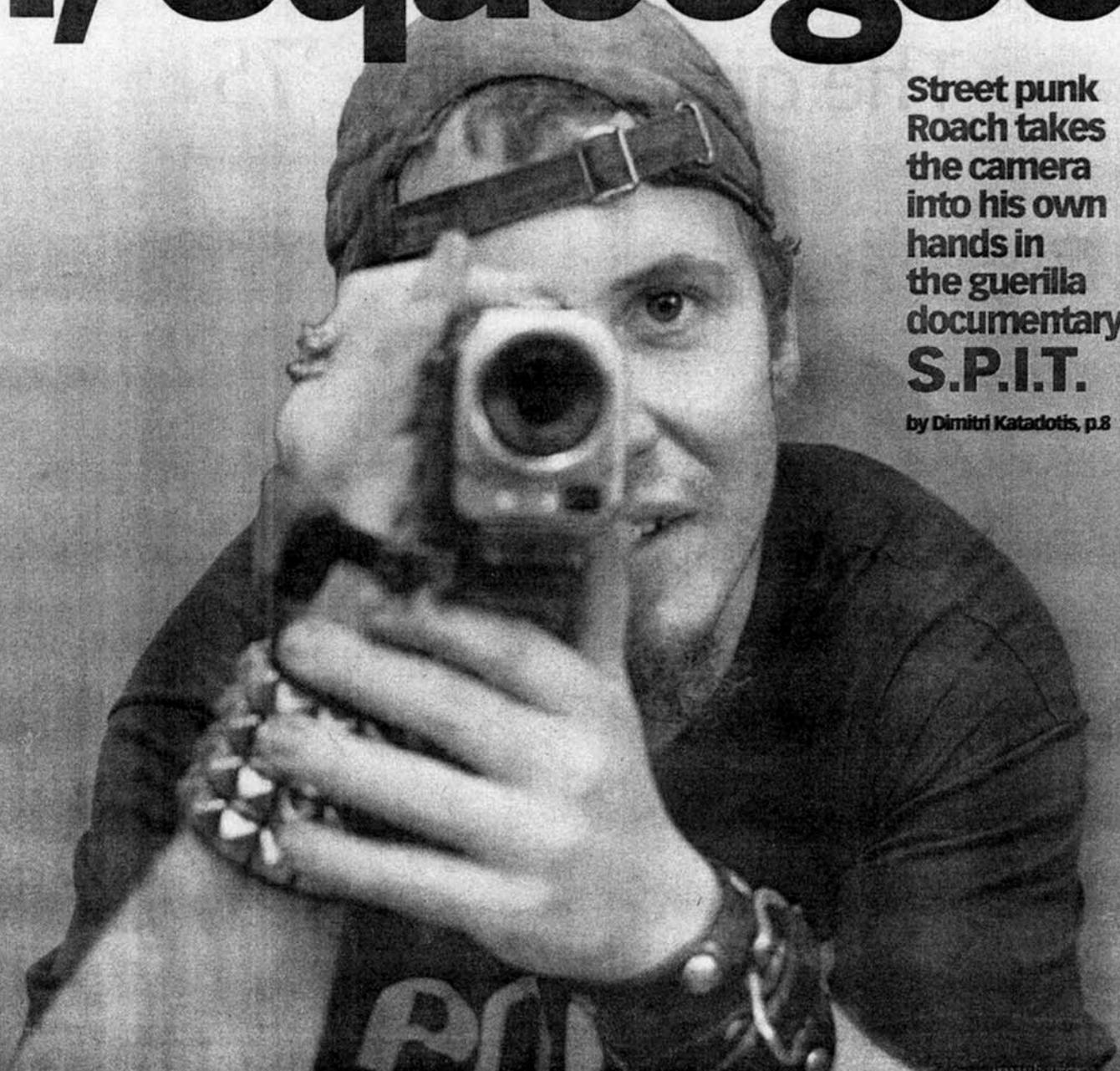
FREE

Hour

I, Squeegee

Street punk
Roach takes
the camera
into his own
hands in
the guerilla
documentary
S.P.I.T.

by Dimitri Katadotis, p.8



montreal/hour vol.no (9:50) 140,940 readers EVERY THURSDAY 01/12/13 to 01/12/19

YOUR AVERAGE SHOPPING MALL SANTA EXPLAINED Hour looks at a Christmas staple in *Explainer*, p. 4
GIVING WORD A BEATING Montreal's O.L.1.K.U. on marrying the meaning with the music, by Josh Dolgin, p. 10
DANCING IN THE STREETS Les Sortilèges explore cultural diversity in *Au rythme de la ville*, by Philip Szporer, p. 25

The real punks on the streets where you live

REVIEW

**S.P.I.T.:
SQUEEGEE PUNKS IN TRAFFIC**

Rating: ★★ ★

Playing at Cinéma du Parc.
Parents' guide: constant profanity, drug use.

MARK LEPAGE
The Gazette

They ran them out of New York. They cracked down on them in Toronto. "They" are the authorities, "them" are the squeegee punks. In Montreal, there remain some Squeegee Punks In Traffic.

Daniel Cross's street's-eye-view documentary traces the travails of one aptly-named Roach, who opens the film with a brief *joual* how-to on turning hair into fish-fin spikes. How does he do it? Watch him.

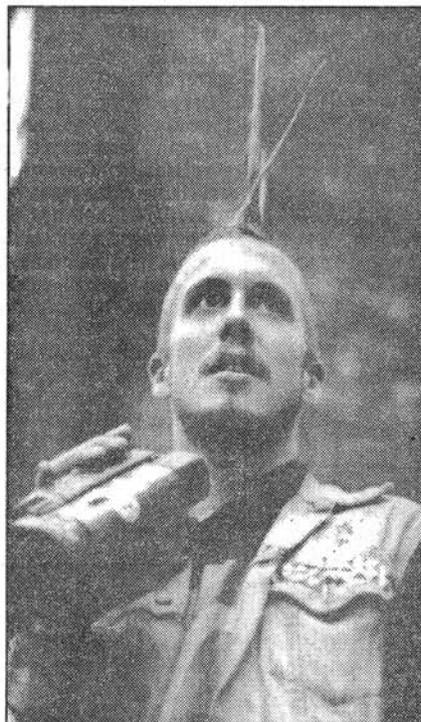
Watch him because Roach, né Eric Denis, is a sweet, ingenuous punk with a squeegee and a snaggle-toothed charm. "On sait que dimanche, le squeegee marche pas bien bien, là," he says. Mainly, he will describe his life in the streets, alleys and overpass crawl spaces of Montreal in reliable if accented English.

Roach will get around, as Roaches do. Up and down the Main, he runs into cutthroat panhandler competition. He becomes the target of apparently senseless violence from local merchants. Cross's handheld cameras capture his 99-cent slice-o-life; then Cross outfits his subject with his own RoachCam™, an act of true documentary empowerment. Roach declares his camera "a speaker's corner for every street kid."

He gets farther around, following the squeegee issue to Quebec City and Toronto, where bumpkin Mayor Mel Lastman marshals an entire police force against – against what, exactly? Cross's film is, indeed, a platform for street-kid politics, and small wonder: they are, after all, outnumbered and unarmed.

Roach's story unfolds with the usual sad detail. Divorce, drugs, juvie home, homelessness. Cross accents the reality over the reasons. The experience of sleeping on air-vents will be described. Intravenous drug use will be captured with zero romance or gutter-chic. Roach is even "selling drugs to pay my own drugs," working for the bikers, but escapes that downward spiral; for now. Watch him entertain a lecture hall filled with socially conscious citizens. Then hear him stumble through the skyscrapers and bank headquarters of Toronto. "F--ing capitalism! I'm on mushrooms, man."

S.P.I.T. does not sanitize the Roach experience. I



COURTESY OF CINÉMA DU PARC

Roach (Eric Denis) takes filming into his own hands with the RoachCam.

don't know if I've ever heard the f-word used more liberally. Cross also manages to annoy many police officers with his diligence, making sure he bears witness to their dealings with the homeless kids. I also know that S.P.I.T. is intended to arouse pity and anger in the viewer when a stoned Roach is beaten stupid by unknown assailants. Mission accomplished.

Cross's film captures an urban experience most would rather wish or legislate away without getting their windshields smeared. Roach remains as a kind of 21st-century Riddley Walker, scuttling across a wasted landscape, a survivor. Perhaps the film's most heartening postmodern moment occurs toward the end, when all Roach's open, goofy charm coalesces in a small instance of media stardom. The punk, carrying a boom mic, gets in a question at an Ontario government media scrum, drawing one of those alarming "Just watch us" hardliner answers. As the credits roll, we see Cross has honourably – and justifiably – given Roach an "assistant director" credit. Here's hoping he pursues his new career.

❖ *Mark Lepage's E-mail address is mlepage@thegazette.southam.ca.*

Roach-eye view

(cover)

Documentary *S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks in Traffic* takes you on the other side of the windshield

By Dimitri Katadotis

This is how Roach tells it: over three years ago, the young squeegee punk was at his wit's end. He had a fight with his girlfriend and had been kicked back on the street, with nothing but a backpack and his dog in tow. Desperate, Roach (aka Eric Denis) called his caseworker at Le Bon Dieu Dans La Rue, who had a singular proposition. There was this guy, a filmmaker, whom she thought he should meet. Soon after, the two hooked up during an anti-MAL civil disobedience demo at Berri square. "I saw in his eyes that this was somebody I could work with," Roach remembers. On the spot, he accepted to collaborate on the proposed project. A couple of days later, after being bailed out of jail, Roach was handed a camera.

This is how Daniel Cross tells it: "When I met Roach it was really immediate. He was passionate, politically engaged - a leader in the milieu and a natural vedette. He'd been there, done his time. Right away he made it clear to me what was and wasn't acceptable. He wasn't wishy-washy. The next thing I knew I was giving him my camera. I had to find another one."

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S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks in Traffic, the film Roach and Cross along with co-producer/cinematographer Mila Aung-Thwin eventually made together, hits you in the face with its frank, absolutely direct account of the ragged existence of the kids consigned to living off spare change, homeless in the city. Cross accomplished something similar with his debut, much-acclaimed doc *The Street*, an unabashedly intimate portrait of a group of itinerant men who clustered around Guy metro station, but *S.P.I.T.* goes even further. Here we get Roach's point of view, live and uncensored. Through the lens of the "RoachCam" we see the drugs, the beatings, the highs and the lows; we experience the thrill of participating in street demos and the anxiety of being drunk and lost in frozen Quebec City looking for a warm place to sleep. All along, Roach provides a running commentary, an interior-monologue diary of his days and nights.

Roach, who was given few instructions by Cross other than the imperative to shoot what he saw, says that for him the camera "became a tool of self-expression. It gave me a voice, allowed me to get a message across, to release all this stuff that had been boiling up in me. But more than that, it was a weapon of my rebellion against a corrupt society that criminalizes poverty." It also - and this is crucial - became the instrument of his self-actualization.

Today, you see, Roach is off the street. Though he still wears the uniform

of a squeegee punk - the tatty jeans, jack boots and studded leather jacket - he has an apartment and has kicked his addiction to cocaine. He's become a filmmaker in his own right, having recently completed shooting material in British Columbia for a doc about the underground punk highway that links Quebec and western Canada. It's a transformation that you see happening on screen in *S.P.I.T.*

"Before doing the film I was on the street, I was just a fucking junkie," he says. "But here I am - I'm Roach. I now have the tools to get out. There's lots of kids out there who are intelligent, but maybe their parents don't help them out. They're on their own. You don't know what they lived. Maybe they were raped. You don't know. People shouldn't judge. People should understand."

"My father never taught me to shave. It's the little things, all these little things. Some kids don't know how to brush their teeth, how to cook rice. And then they're made into criminals because they're fighting to survive."

Roach gets visibly upset talking about the world he managed to escape. Over the course of making *S.P.I.T.* he lost over a dozen friends and acquaintances, all casualties in one way or another of what he calls society's pernicious "invisible cycle." Fostered by government policy, it's a system whereby kids are ticketed by the cops for squeegeeing then sent to jail when the fines aren't paid. In jail, the kids are recruited by hardened criminals, and when they come out they end up working for the bikers as drug dealers or prostitutes. "They're treating a social problem as if it were a criminal problem. All they're doing is creating more criminals," Roach croaks in his gravelly voice, his eyes lit up with anger.

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Looking at it now, *S.P.I.T.* is inseparable from Roach, but things could have gone quite differently. Cross says that when he was trying to secure funding for the project he put together a show-reel teaser - a method that had proved fruitful with *The Street*. This time, though, he repeatedly received negative responses. As a protagonist, it seems, Roach was judged too abrasive, too outspoken, not sympathetic enough. Nobody wanted to know from this loudmouthed, unashamed drug addict. "So I started re-editing the film, adding more quiet moments," Cross recounts. "The problem is that it started feeling more and more like *The Street*, and I didn't want that, I didn't want it to be passive. Roach is a guy with ideals, with a manifesto, and considering the situation he faced, how could he not be angry?" Putting aside his doubts, Cross took the leap.

"Roach gave me the access. Without him I would have had to start over every day," Cross says. "You can't



ROACH AND DANIEL CROSS: GIVE A KID A CAMERA AND JUST SEE WHAT HE'LL DO

photo: Benoit Aquin

just join the street scene uninvited: you will be challenged. And who am I? I just look like the oppressor - I'm just this fat old white guy."

Still, there is some material Cross remains ambivalent about. Halfway through *S.P.I.T.*, for instance, there's a long, uninterrupted take in which Cross follows Roach as he takes cover in the shit-fouled nook of a church to shoot up in broad daylight. We see Roach quickly inject himself, drawing his hit right out of a baggie, and stay with him as he walks away stunned and stoned, his eyes scanning the ground for cigarette butts. Veering toward the sensational, the footage is devastating in its sustained candour. "Originally that scene was much shorter," Cross comments. "But I insisted that we let it play out as it was filmed. It had to challenge why we are watching the movie, make us ask, 'Who is this guy?' Even today that scene makes me uncomfortable when it comes on."

Cross may have his reservations, but no one, I think, could ever accuse him of exploiting Roach for his own ends. Cross gets involved. As much as Roach has helped him, he's helped Roach. In fact, he's still helping Roach - it's Cross's production company that's producing Roach's latest project. The two talk to each other every day. "I've had to take on a lot of responsibility that has nothing to do with filmmaking," he says, pausing before he corrects himself. "Actually, that responsibility has everything to do with the way I make films." At this point, there's nothing that gives Cross greater pleasure than to see Roach get up on stage after a screening of *S.P.I.T.* and engage the crowd.

"You know the film itself is not enough," Cross says finally. "I don't really think it's going to change much - it'll amuse and entertain an audience for a short while. But what you have left is this link, this relationship. That lasts." (-)

S.P.I.T.: Squeegee Punks in Traffic
Screens Dec 21 to Jan 10
at Ex-Centris.
It screens at
the Cinéma du Parc
starting Jan 25.

The war on squeegees in Mtl and T-O

I, like *S.P.I.T.*'s Eric "Roach" Denis, you hit the streets of Toronto with a squeegee. You probably won't have much company these days. Thanks to Ontario's Safe Streets Act, squeegeeing and "aggressive panhandling" are criminal offences in the province, and carry a maximum penalty of \$500 and/or six months in jail. Enacted in late 1999, the act has essentially put an end to squeegeeing in Canada's largest city.

The same people have moved on to other means of making a buck: they are panhandling, or "cupping," which is simply begging for money in traffic. Others have moved on to more illicit and dangerous activities, according to one expert.

"Drug dealing is huge now," YouthLink supervisor Karen Postano says. As a supervisor for YouthLink, a Toronto-area resource centre for homeless youth, Postano has seen less squeegeeing and more drug dealing and prostitution among homeless youth.

"It's small time dealing to support a habit," Postano says. "There is more prostitution as well."

Carlos Francis agrees. He was the supervisor of Squeegee Working Youth Mobilization (SWYM), which helped youth who wouldn't normally use employment programs and shelters. But the program had to change its name, because squeegees no longer applied. Now, he says, there are more young panhandlers, beggars, drug dealers and prostitutes.

"Squeegeeing is just an activity," Francis says. "Young people will learn how to survive in a second. The number of youth on the streets hasn't changed at all since the Safe Streets Act - only what they do is different."

It is difficult to estimate how many squeegees remain in Toronto. The rough estimate in 1998 was about 200; that number is probably closer to 20 now, Francis says.

More often than not, tickets go unpaid. Instead, many squeegees turn them over to the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, which fights the tickets in court.

Justice for Children and Youth has fought the Safe Streets Act in the courts, though provincial judge William Babe recently ruled in favour of the provincial government. The group will argue its appeal in late March 2002.

In Montreal, meanwhile, squeegeeing is treated less harshly than in Toronto. There are no specific laws against the practice: typically, squeegees caught by police are charged either with disturbing the peace, a municipal violation, or with soliciting a vehicle occupant, which is against the province's highway code and is the same charge police lay against prostitutes. Fines aren't nearly as high: the typical ticket for squeegeeing is anywhere from \$27 to \$136, and defendants don't face jail time for a first offence. Instead, the cops wage a war of attrition, by ticketing squeegees and throwing them in jail when the fines go unpaid.

The end result has been a reduction in the number of squeegees in both cities.

"When it started in Montreal [about six years ago] it was a social movement to protest the system," says researcher Colette Foisy, who studied the city's squeegee movement for a 1998 project on the subject. "Then people started doing it for the money. There were more addicts. The movement was tarnished a little bit."

Still, Foisy estimates there are still 50 full-time squeegees in the city and about 200 part-timers. Unlike in Toronto, there is no agency that fights squeegee tickets in court. Foisy says she takes each case individually and looks for an out-of-court settlement.

Martin Patriquin

FEB 27-MAR 5, 2003

Priceless

WESTENDER

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VANCOUVER'S URBAN

Roadworthy

Squeegee Punks In Traffic
follows migrant life of street kids

RICK TREMBLES' MOTION PICTURE PURGATORY

S.P.I.T.: SQUEEGEE PUNKS IN TRAFFIC

AT THE HEIGHT OF ANTI-SQUEEGEE HYSTERIA (DECLARED PUBLIC ENEMY #1 ON THE NEWS), MONTREAL Doc FILMMAKER DANIEL CROSS (RENOWNED FOR '97'S THE STREET: A FILM WITH THE HOMELESS), GAVE LOCAL SQUEEGEE PUNK "ROACH" A PORTABLE VIDEO RECORDER TO DOCUMENT THE FRONT LINES OF THE "WAR AGAINST THE HOMELESS" / ROACH GIDDILY DUBS HIS "ROACH-CAM" THE "ACID-CAM" AFTER GETTING SO HIGH ALL HE CAN DO IS MUMBLE "DRUG IS MY LIFE" & WAVE IT AROUND HIS BEDROOM AIMED AT HIS FACE, THEN IT'S RE-CHRISTENED THE "LOST-CAM" AFTER FINDING HIMSELF PANICKED IN SUBZERO-WEATHER QUEBEC CITY, DRUNK & STRANDED, LOOKING FOR AN OVERNIGHT OUTDOOR SQUAT. FINALLY, THE ROACH/ACID/LOST-CAM BECOMES A WEAPON OF SORTS ("COPS WON'T BOTHER YOU IF YOU HAVE A CAMERA") DELIVERING INCREDIBLE P.O.V.S FROM WITHIN STREAMS OF PEPPER SPRAY AT VARIOUS RIOTS & DEMOS, DODGING THE CEASELESS THREAT OF HYPOTHERMIA & VARIOUS MONKEYS ON HIS BACK, ROACH EMBARKS ON A SERIES OF ROAD TRIPS THAT LEAD HIM TO PARLIMENT, FACE TO FACE WITH THE VERY CULPRITS TRYING TO "INTRODUCE A BILL" TO SWEEP THE LIKES OF HIM UNDER THE RUG!

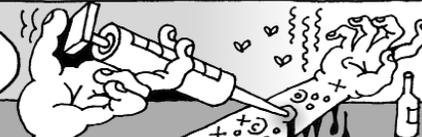
See! ... A GIRL FILMING ROACH DOING HIS JOB, GET VIOLENTLY ASSAULTED BY AN IRATE, DEMENTED, WELL-DRESSED THUG ON A BUSY STREET AS DAZED BYSTANDERS WATCH HELPLESSLY! THE ALTERCATION LEAVES HER SHAKING & SHE SCREAMS TO REMIND HIM HIS EVERY ACTION'S BEING RECORDED IN BLATANTLY INCRIMINATING P.O.V. FOOTAGE AS ROACH CHASES AFTER HIM FOR HITTING A WOMAN!

Actual Quote: "WE'RE NOT FUCKEN GARBAGE LIKE THEY THINK WE ARE, SO DON'T FUCKEN JUDGE ME BECAUSE I DO SQUEEGEE OR I SHOOT UP OR I DO DRUGS OR I DRINK..."



See! ... ROACH MAINLINING BOTTLED WATER & BLOW IN BROAD DAYLIGHT (MOISTENING & SIPHONING IT FRESH FROM THE BAG), LICKING HIS WOUNDS FOR BLOODY RESIDUE, HE FEVERISHLY SEARCHES FOR DOPE & MONEY ON THE GROUND, ALL THE WHILE EXPLAINING HIMSELF TO OCCASIONAL INTERVIEWER CROSS! "DON'T TALK TO ME OR I'LL LOSE MY BUZZ," HE WARNS! HE SHOWS US 2K DOLLARS WORTH OF TRACK MARKS BRUISING HIS ARM & LONGS TO STOP BEING "BIKER PROPERTY" SO HE FLEES MONTREAL ALONG WITH THE ROACH-CAM TO REBUILD HIS LIFE!

Actual Quote: "ROACH-CAM IS MY DIARY!"



See! ... ROACH'S NEWFOUND PALS LASCIVIOUSLY SMOOCHING ON THE HOOD OF A CAVED-IN CAR SMASHED UP THE PREVIOUS NIGHT WHILE HAVING SEX AT THE WHEEL, LIKE SOMETHING STRAIGHT OUT OF CRONENBERG'S CRASH (1997)!

Actual Quote: "I'D LIKE TO PUT ALL THE BUILDINGS DOWN & LET GROW THE TREES AGAIN! I GROW CARROTS, HE GROWS SALAD, SOMEBODY ELSE GROWS POT, SOMEBODY ELSE GROWS CUCUMBERS & WE ALL EXCHANGE! WHAT I'M DREAMING OF IS EVERYBODY'S THERE FOR SOMETHING! FREEDOM!"



See! ... ROACH BADLY PUMMELED, AFTER PARTYING IN TROIS-RIVIERES WHERE HE GOT SO DRUNK ON DISCOUNT DOLLAR BEERS THAT HE SQUEEGEED A CARLOAD FULL OF GOONS FOR FREE DESPITE THEM DECLINING HIS OFFER! THIS GETS HIM A BOTTLE SMASHED IN THE FACE & KICKED IN WHILE UNCONSCIOUS. AWAITING DIAGNOSIS, HE CONSULTS A DEAD FRIEND HE TALKS TO IN DIFFICULT TIMES (WHICH HAPPENS TO BE EVERY DAY)!

Actual Quote: "I DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD, BUT I BELIEVE IN SPIRITS!"



SPENDING PRETEENHOOD IN JUVENILE DETENTION IS WHAT MADE ROACH CRAVE FREEDOM ON THE STREETS & WHILE DOING TIME HE DOODLED UP A CAST OF APOCALYPTIC PUNK & ZOMBIE CHARACTERS MODELED AFTER HIS CRONIES, PLOTTING TO OBLITERATE THEIR HOME TOWN! THE BOOKS WERE CONFISCATED, BUT HE MANAGED TO SALVAGE ENOUGH TO COMPEL DIRECTOR CROSS TO HIRE YOURS TRULY TO ANIMATE A SHORT ADAPTATION MIMICKING ROACH'S ROLICKING RAWNESS OF LINE! SEE THE SEGMENT INSIDE S.P.I.T.!

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