

Adverts decapitated into art

In an age when we are bombarded by ads more than ever, London's mysterious Decapitator is getting his own back

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Ahead of his time: the Decapitator's handiwork. Photograph: Flickr

Walking around the increasingly commercialised streets of East London, you may come across an ad that doesn't look quite right. Instead of a polished, airbrushed head on a film poster, you'll be presented with a bloody stump and some splattered gore.

The self-titled Decapitator is twisting bus ads and flyposters with his DIY paste-up amendments which remove the heads of people in advertisements. (See his handiwork [here](#).) There's something very satisfying about the violence of the work - it's like looking at the city through the eyes of Travis Bickle. We're a society accustomed to blood and gore. Violence is the background to modern life - the fundamental core of how the 21st century works. (Don't ask me - ask the delightful Slavoj Žižek who made it the subject of his new book, *Violence*, out last week.)

Graffiti and vandalism often create a violent public reaction. I'd argue advertisements are the real vandals creating a much more stressful public space. Advertising is saturating the environment. There are ads on coffee cups, the back of train tickets, napkins, the underside of stairs. Projected ads force your eye to look at them on tube platforms, with a never-ending swirl of colour and movement. There are TV screens blasting adverts on buses, flashing on escalators, filling (and wrapped around) the pages of free papers shoved in our face four times a day.

There is an interesting anti-advertising movement emerging in France. *Les Déboulonneurs* (the dismantlers) meet at billboards around the country and arrange to publicly tear the imagery down. They are unmasked, do it in daylight and openly announce about where they go. The aim is to force public debate about the way we are subjected to this advertising bombardment. The Decapitator makes the same point - but with a lot more style.

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