

# A Many-Shaped Eavesdropper

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Liverpool street station, March 2011

*Advertising posters, custom made to fit on diverse surfaces*

*Photograph for illustration purposes only:*



It seems Fredric Jameson was correct - the "late capitalist" state would be inconceivable without the cultural industries. Its structure relies on modern art and design to the same degree that Victorian society relied on colonial labour, and nowhere is this more evident than in the extraordinary extent to which London is covered in advertising. Having long-ago used up all suitable space on buildings, match boxes and the broadcast media, our adverts are now forced to the margins - are forced to exist on ticket barriers, pavements, and station platforms. It now festoons British cities like so much wilted bunting, gently stroking the train-driven wind for the brief, ever-decreasing intervals between Royal Weddings.

The level of industrial development, sheer demand and ingenious marketing needed to advertise on such unlikely spaces is disturbing. One imagines that in graphic design work-houses throughout the land, whip-driven young men and women are occasionally mutilated by the endless, spinning templates that reproduce the shape of ticket barriers, buses, roof beams, concourses.

The company that manufactures the advertisements seen above - [www.unavoidablemedia.com](http://www.unavoidablemedia.com) - seem unsure whether their ingenious invention presents an dominant "wall of advertising", or a submissive, osmotic barrier that "forces your audience to actually walk through your advertising message". They might well be confused - ticket barriers, in themselves, exist as both these things. They are, indeed, both a wall and an opening, both a denial and a welcome, Scylla and Charybdis as much as St. Peter. The fact they are both of these things is a mundane consequence of their social function. Denial and safe passage exist in ticket barriers in the same way that light, heat, warmth, exist in a match - as an entirely inevitable outcome of their function.

And yet, and yet. Society demands Spectacle, and the creation of Spectacle is achieved through the creation of Image. This is where an explanation may be found for such increasingly pervasive advertising. If all available space has been already used to create spectacle, increasingly unlikely spaces must be found. Further, and further - if all available leisure time is already devoted to the consumption of image, then image must colonise increasingly mundane actions. Here, then, the simple function of a ticket barrier is re-appropriated for the creation of spectacle; its mundane use is transformed into a tool for the manufacturing of desire.

And so on, and so on. As ever-increasing spectacle is demanded, as the consumption of images accelerates, mundane action is increasingly eroded beneath a rising tide of "lifestyle", function is subsumed beneath "design". In short, experience itself is re-appropriated by "experiencing". "Experiencing" places, lifestyles, cultures, a process which, when paired with its consummate technology, the newly-democratic camera - reduces reality back into image, and then image back into fantasy.