



## Politics, publicity, psychology

Although publicity shook off any subversive or nostalgic dimension a long time ago, for many people in this country flyers are linked to the old household printing machines (cyclostyles) known here as “vietnamites” and the protesters rushing at Franco’s police. A good number of citizens from this country passed through the police cells during the dictatorship and were sentenced to imprisonment for the simple fact that they had been caught throwing or holding this type of leaflet.

“Illegal propaganda” was the legal term used by a regime which didn’t recognise such basic rights as freedom of expression or association. However, flyers, which to us were the weapon of the weak—they were more important for giving proof that resistance existed, rather than giving it widespread coverage—have often been the weapon of the powerful in wartime and, of course, a resource of commercial advertising. Flyers, much more than an instrument of resistance, have, throughout history, been a way of inviting the enemy to surrender or to desert, or one of many resources to tempt the voracious consumerism of contemporary man.

The exhibition *Surrender!* traces the use of this propaganda tool in politics and wartime. An instrument as old as the printed page which, obviously, acquires its true importance in modern conflict, characterised by the direct involvement of the masses in wars (the rearguard becomes a place as important as the front line) and the use of modern technological means—particularly aviation—which bring huge quantities of flyers to their recipients. Counteracting enemy propaganda, demobilising the rearguard, exploiting situations of demoralisation in order to hasten the break up of the adversary’s troops or foster desertion, are some of the aims of this psychological tool which serves the strategies of the general staff.

Of course, the usage and the actual literature of flyers meet the well-studied criteria of propaganda and agitation, which in the age of advertising, have a great deal to do with systems of commercial persuasion. It isn’t hard to work out that flyers require simple, categorical messages, without elaborate arguments, with little text and a font size which makes it possible to read them without picking them up from the ground, thereby avoiding putting the intended recipient in a compromising position. (Requisites, incidentally, seldom met by the flyers of the anti-Franco resistance, produced by militants who had such a keen perception of reality that they believed the working masses were clamouring to read the convoluted communiqués of their doctrine about the imminent downfall of the system). Throughout the modern age, politics has found ways of reinforcing and improving its efficiency in advertising techniques and so-called human sciences, particularly psychology and statistical sociology. Michel Foucault has explained better than anyone the development of techniques for exercising power and the legitimising role which some areas of knowledge have agreed to play around them. Looking at the role of flyers, in order to trace some of the events of the twentieth century, is like casting a peculiar and specific gaze onto the triangle of the three p’s (politics, publicity and (social) psychology) which symbolise the strategic culture of modern politics.

This exhibition falls within the context of the different approaches to the twentieth century and urban culture—from film to television, from luminaries of thought to the cultural spirit of cities or the evolution of urban public space—which the CCCB is promoting as this century nears its close.