

ción de la mascota. Cabría sintetizar los diversos usos «contraculturales» de la mascota en cuatro puntos:

1. La apropiación popular y reivindicativa del Cobi por parte de colectivos y asociaciones que encontraron en sus trazos sintéticos una forma sencilla, impactante y fácilmente reconocible por todos. Un Cobi que se muestra solidario con los problemas de la «tribu», y participa activamente en campañas y reivindicaciones populares contra la droga (el Cobi-yonki), contra el terrorismo (el Cobi-Corcuera), etc. Esta aplicación «poco ortodoxa» de la mascota expresa una cierta asimilación del Cobi como personaje totémico.

2. En segundo lugar, el uso de un Cobi transfigurado a partir de unos atributos que son contradictorios con los del «Cobi oficial», que presenta un carácter eminentemente lúdico. Por ejemplo, el Cobi-policía busca un efecto sorpresa y tiene una intención desenmascaradora de los Juegos Olímpicos.

Ya hemos señalado que el Cobi puede interpretar diversos papeles, puesto que tiene una gran capacidad de trasvertirse: incluso se puede vestir de policía.

3. Hay otras versiones del Cobi, al que se le reconoce una personalidad que trasciende su conducta oficial y formal. Hay, por ejemplo, un Cobi-loco, que hace un corte de mangas, y un Cobi-avispado, que se dedica a especular y se aprovecha del suceso olímpico para enriquecerse.

4. Finalmente, el uso del Cobi - anti-Cobi. El Cobi aparece como un personaje sin personalidad, o un perrito desvalido, desposeído de todos sus encantos, convertido en víctima propiciatoria de las iras de los grupos radicales y contestatarios. Se puede hallar, por ejemplo, un Cobi ahorcado (por grupos independentistas) o un Cobi zurrado (por grupos anarquistas). Llevado al extremo, podemos encontrar un Cobi quemado como si fuera una bandera. Este sacrificio ritual de la mascota olímpica significa la aniquilación simbólica del enemigo. No es casual que hayan sido los grupos independentistas los que hayan quemado un Cobi como quien quema una bandera española.

A ACCEPTANCE AND SOCIAL APPROPRIATION OF THE BARCELONA'92 OLYMPIC MASCOT

INTRODUCTION

The present article is divided into three parts:

1. The first part, relative to the social acceptance of Cobi, briefly analyzes the problems and implications that arise during the difficult process of choosing an olympic mascot. Secondly, a reference is made to the degree of popular acceptance and the opposition met with against the olympic mascot among important sectors of the population.

2. The second part includes a series of sociological considerations on the «aesthetics» and «antiaesthetics» of Cobi as a product of the cultural industry and as an object of design.

3. The third part refers to the use and social appropriation of Cobi, especially by radical and contestatory groups. This last part includes a repertoire of the most significant and suggestive images of the «anti-Cobi».

1. THE SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF COBI

The «rupturist» characteristics of the mascot and the controversy it raised —which we will analyze in detail later— conditioned the acceptance of the mascot, especially at the beginning, as the distinctive emblem of the Barcelona '92 Olympic Games.

Traditionally, religious images and icons (that can be considered as our more or less remote cultural background of olympic mascots) acted as symbols and emblems of the collective identity of a people and claimed the almost «spontaneous» identification and support of all its members. Nevertheless, a modern mascot produced in the midst of great cultural variety and diversity can produce, especially due to its innovative character, a very controversial response without necessarily losing its emblematic force. At first, the drawing of Cobi generated —as did the *Naranjito* (mascot of the Soccer World Championship held in Spain in 1982) in its time, but for other reasons — a great deal of arguments.

The consequence of the opposition generated by the mascot was the carrying out and publication of opinion polls about the mascot. It is a normal resort in modern democratic societies to use surveys and opinion studies in order to legitimate decisions of a political or institutional nature. Paradoxically, the Moscow '80 mascot (the Misha bear) was chosen in a public contest by direct voting in a television programme in which over 40.000 people participated. A country that could not democratically elect its political representatives could, nevertheless, democratically choose its olympic «totem».

The importance placed on popular acceptance should not surprise us. In the mascot contest rules it was made explicit that the mascot would have to be accepted by everyone and that it was especially directed to an audience of children.

The Cobi: a difficult choice

As was evidenced among the members of the Jury in charge of electing a mascot, this task is far from being trivial and simple. It is a choice which must take many aspects into consideration. In spite of this, in the case of Cobi it was apparently easier to play it safe by reproducing old patterns which are guaranteed to work (for example, bland Walt Disney-type figures).

In the field of cultural production, especially in the production of new images—and in contrast to what occurs in some sectors of production of goods destined for mass consumption—there are no magic recipes that will ensure a product's success. The large promotional advertising campaigns no doubt contribute to the success of a new product, but they do not constitute a magic formula nor are they an absolute guarantee that the product will succeed. Often, the creators of a story and a set of animated cartoons are, especially in the world of cartoons and movies, the first to be surprised by the wide acceptance of their proposal. This would explain the tendency towards the tiring repetition of formulas, like Superman I, II, III, etc., once they have shown to be accepted.

To put forth or introduce an innovating cultural proposal means assuming a very high risk. It is very difficult to make predictions. In the field of movies, a strategy used by the producers and distributors is to create a great expectation long before the film is released. In the case of the movie industry, the USA already has great experience. It is difficult to ensure the long permanence of a film in movie theatres, but an attempt can be made at prolonging its exhibition time as long as possible. One way of creating expectations is by means of the «charisma» of actresses or actors starring in the film, who are often even more popular than the director himself. What has come to be known as the «star system» was a necessity or an invention of the movie industry itself, that promoted its stars with astronomical salaries and often made up a fascinating biography around them. Thus, the pretense is to generate a great expectation and a favourable state of opinion around the film. This is also—respecting the differences—the strategy used by the people responsible for the American basketball league (NBA), who promote their leading figures—like Magic Johnson—and turn them into absolute stars.

The choice of an olympic mascot is, nevertheless, a very special instance. In the case of the Mariscal mascot, the wager was less risky, since the mascot did not have to compete in equal conditions with other fiction characters (Ninja Turtles, The Simpson's, etc), nor with other olympic images or mascots of the past. The unquestionable thing is that whether one likes the mascot or not it has already made a place for itself among the olympic symbols and this ensures that its presence is important. One does not have to be monarchical to accept (willingly or otherwise) the figure of the King, nor the Monarchy as the highest instance of institutional representation. Even if the figure of the King was not

charismatic, the fact of exercising his power function endows him with a certain charisma. It is therefore not necessary that one likes Cobi or that one be a «Cobimaniac» in order to accept it and become used to its «omnipresence».

At the same time—as was predictable—the degree of acceptance of the mascot has grown very much with time. As one high representative of the image section of the COOB said, «Cobi is like tonic soda. You don't like it at first, but the more you taste it, the better you like it». This fact can be easily proved by the data of the opinion polls (see Tables 1 and 2).

Obviously, Mariscal's innovating proposal wished to break away from old patterns and assume the risk implied by any novelty in the field of aesthetics. Also, the importance of the Games confers a great importance to Cobi as one of the main symbols of Barcelona '92. The fact that the Cobi figure is inextricably linked to the olympics acts as a shock absorber and eases the aesthetic acceptance of the mascot. We believe that the process of habituation has made us come to accept the omnipresence of Cobi and that even many people who were initially against it have forgotten their «first impression» of a mascot which seemed «very ugly» at first. Simultaneously to the wish of reaching an (aesthetic) acceptance of Cobi, it is important to find or invent the function or role of the mascot in modern Games. In the case of Cobi, many new uses and functions have been tried and invented that had never been tried before.

The process of habituation will play a very important role and this probably means that at the time of the Games, the symbolic implications will make any aesthetic judgement inappropriate or impertinent (in the same way that it would be improper to criticize—for aesthetic reasons—the *Moreneta* (Patron Saint of Catalonia)).

What do the opinion polls say?

As we have already said, the religious images comprised within a profound tradition can be more or less «spontaneously» accepted within the ritual practice of a community. The mascot, on the other hand, is an innovating cultural product, «something strange» without too many points of reference whether in the field of sports mascots, doll figures or in the history of cartoons or comics. This explains why formal and aesthetic-type reasons have acquired a first rate importance and generated «opposition». The choice of the Cobi is (as opposed to other mascots) a difficult one because it is done without relying on the mascot tradition (most mascots represent a typical and emblematic animal of the city or nation that is hosting the Games), nor does it resemble the drawings and figures of Walt Disney, the most widespreadly used for other mascots.

However, this «newness» factor has several advantages, since novelty always catches more attention and raises more expectation, avoiding the almost inevitable wearing down that takes place in readily assimilated images which end up becoming tiring.

In a sociological study of these characteristics, it is important to carry out an analysis that takes into consideration the social response towards and acceptance of the mascot from a dynamic point of view. In this section, we analyze the evolu-

tion or changes in opinion that have taken place with time in reference to the olympic mascot. The level of acceptance of the mascot has grown gradually and has had the effect of considerably reducing the initial discrepancies in relation to Cobi. There is the risk, however, of presupposing —without enough elements to prove it— that any symbol which has widespread institutional and publicitary support is guaranteed to obtain full popular acceptance. The force of marketing and publicity is important, but not infallible. There have been cases, like that of *Naranjito* (mascot of the Soccer World Championship '82), a symbol whose functions were similar to those of Cobi, that undergo a very fast wearing down process. It must be said, though, that this criticism of the *Naranjito* becomes more and more accentuated as time goes by. It turns into a phenomenon similar to that of fashions: an «old-fashioned» object can be contemplated many years later as something ridiculous.

Miguel Giménez Salinas, director of the image department of the COOB, is absolutely convinced of the mascot's possibilities. According to Miguel Giménez, Cobi always had the support of the COOB '92, even after the advent of opinions against it generated by controversy:

We knew it was a winning design, but there were too many voices that doubted the acceptance of a rupturist and advanced project. To choose it as the mascot of the Barcelona '92 Games was a step towards the future, a wager on design produced in Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, and thus break away with [...].¹

The level of acceptance of the mascot has grown considerably. But it is not true that it is appreciated —as the main representative of the COOB's image department says— by 90% of the population. He seems to be more worried about promoting and selling the mascot than in giving truthful information:

Today, when Cobi is just two years old, the Barcelona '92 mascot already has a worldwide index of acceptance which is somewhat over 95%. No one remembers the controversy about «the ugly scribble of a dog», as someone referred to it.

In spite of these words, the Cobi continued to be —a year before the celebration of the Games— disliked by one of every three citizens of Catalonia. In fact, Cobi is still faced with opposition that it would be candid to ignore. According to data from a survey published by the *Avui* newspaper in July of 1991, just a year before the Games, the level of acceptance of the mascot in Catalonia has grown sensibly, but still generates strong «resistance» forces (see table 2). The mascot is liked and, therefore, accepted by 62.7% of Catalan citizens, but there is still 33.8% of the population who evaluate the mascot in negative terms. However, if we compare these data with those published by the newspaper *El País* in relation to a survey carried out immediately after the social presentation of the mascot (March 15th, 1988), we see that

1. Interview granted by Miguel Giménez Salinas, *Avui*, March 25th 1990. «The Cobi olympic fever wishes to beat records in the 1992 commercial race».

the degree of acceptance of the mascot has grown ostensibly (see table 1). According to the data of the survey, only one out of every four Catalan citizens likes the mascot. Of the citizens of Barcelona, only 24% considered the mascot positively and approvingly, then, while over half (52%) the population thought of it in negative terms and 13% considered it average. The level of acceptance increases sensibly with time and, at the time of the celebration of the Games, it is possible that this level will be somewhat over 75%.

Only 2.8% of those interviewed in Catalonia did not have an opinion about the mascot. The degree of acquaintance with the mascot is very high and this was already a fact immediately after the drawing of the mascot was made public (only 11% of the people interviewed did not know the mascot or did not wish to express their opinion). The degree of acquaintance, knowledge and popularity of Cobi is probably higher than that of most important figures within the field of culture and —no doubt— much higher than that of most national political leaders.

According to several informations given by the COOB, foreigners like the mascot more than the natives. If these data are correct, we may be able to apply to Cobi the old saying according to which «No one is a prophet in his own land».

It is still too soon to know the level of sales of the mascot. Several different data have been published in the press, but they are not very coherent in relation to each other and not very reliable.

There are no official data or studies to inform us of the sales so far. However, by means of a series of interviews to shopkeepers and distributors we can state that the mascot sells well, though not spectacularly so. According to our sources of information, a certain sector of the dealers and traders are carrying out a certain boycott —for political reasons— in relation to the subject of the Olympic Games. This boycott has obviously affected the distribution and commercialization of the mascot. A certain inhibition has also been

Table 1

Level (%) of acceptance of Cobi in Barcelona year 1988

I like it very much	7
I like it a little	17
I more or less like it	13
I don't like it much	13
I dislike it	39
Doesn't know / doesn't answer	11

Source: *El País*, March 3rd, 1988, Demoscopia survey.

Table 2

Level (%) of acceptance of Cobi in Catalonia year 1991

I like it very much	15,0
I tend to like it	47,7
I tend to dislike it	11,8
I don't like it at all	22,0
Doesn't know / Doesn't answer	2,8

Source: *Avui* newspaper, July 27th, 1991, survey carried out by the Institut EMB Social.

detected in certain sectors of the Catalan bourgeoisie when it comes to buying «Cobis». It must be said that lately —and with the evernearer advent of the Olympics— there seems to be a significant change of attitude, both on the part of the middle class as well as certain sectors of the more popular layers of population, who have begun to acquire licensed Barcelona '92 products in a more decided manner.

2. THE AESTHETICS AND ANTIAESTHETICS OF COBI

Reflections on Mariscal's proposal

The world of aesthetic and cultural production defines a relatively small field of interest to which, under normal circumstances, only a few experts have access and normally go unawares by the rest of the «public at large».

The world of artistic and cultural creation defines a field of meaning that is relatively autonomous in relation to other political, religious or social instances. It is ruled by internal criteria and has —obviously— its own specialists and experts who reserve for themselves the right to give their opinion according to their technical and professional competence. In most cases, the public at large remains alien to these subjects. Only exceptionally are there issues within the field of culture —as is the case in reference to Cobi— that go beyond the closed circle of experts and become subject to the general interest. For example, before designing the mascot, Xavier Mariscal was a very wellknown person within the circle of artists and designers, but hardly known by the public in general. Thanks to the election of his project, Mariscal has come to be as wellknown and popular as Cobi himself. It is curious to observe that while everyone knows the name of the person who created Cobi, hardly anyone knows Josep Maria Trias, creator of the logotype.

This is, from our point of view, one of the great virtues presented by the mascot as an object of study.

Design or antidesign?

«What do you do, study or design?». It is unnecessary to say that design is in vogue and that the word «design» is very much used in popular everyday language. In these circumstances of «informed market» (everyone thinks he is entitled to giving his opinion on the subject of «design») it shouldn't seem strange that the «experts», designers themselves, have protested and claim a much stricter concept of what their professional activity really is. This circumstance is especially difficult when it refers to relatively new professions —as is the case of design— with little tradition and, especially, with an imprecise social profile. From the point of view of design professionals, there is a fear that anyone who so wishes to can make himself pass for a «designer» without the necessary studies or minimum technical training.

Because of its vagueness, we will try to avoid the popular conception of design. We will, on the other hand, stick to a much more «professional» definition of it. The term «design» does not only refer to a more or less aesthetic object or to a finished product, but rather to a process of conception

and elaboration of products, messages or images according to a wide and global conception of the process of communication. In any case, the finished product is the result or visual expression of a rationalized communication process established between the emitter and a series of receptors.

Mariscal is not a designer in the conventional sense of the word; as we will see, he is more of a «designer-artist», very conscious, nevertheless, of his condition as a «communicator». Mariscal himself defines his own conception of this communication process in the following terms:

People come to see me with spoken words or written words and I turn that into a visual image that communicates with others by means of colours and shapes[...]. In truth, what we produce are sandwiches, sandwiches for the mind, for the brain. We make culture and thanks to the fact that a lot of people are producing culture man does not feel so alone.²

One particular aspect of Mariscal as a designer is that he is fundamentally concerned with the idea and the concept, and he is only concerned about the type of material support in a basically instrumental sense.

For me, work is communication. Communication through images and shapes, whatever the support may be. To create beautiful things and transmit something, a way of understanding work and life. We work on what we know as culture, which is the food that our mind needs, and we are creating new alphabets, new points of reference to communicate with each other.³

Mariscal does not center his activity around solving the technical and material problems that may arise. However, this does not mean that he is unconcerned with these matters.

Mariscal tends to work with other «designer-technicians» who help him to solve the technical problems and even make formal suggestions, in much the same way as he also contributes to the solution of technical problems.

The first drawings of Cobi that Mariscal presented, though they somehow anticipated the basic shapes, did not meet the basic industrial or graphic design requirements. As we have already said, design is not a mere graphic process; it is a much wider process related (let us not forget) to the production of objects with a more or less utilitarian use. In the process of creating the design, three important aspects can be distinguished. These are: creativity, rationality and control over the creative process. Mariscal is an art designer or an artist-designer. In the case of his work, the charismatic personality of the author results in a prevalence of the creative aspect over the rest. So much so, that other «professionals-designers» have collaborated with Mariscal in the study of the possible applications, supports and most adequate materials in order to produce his brilliant ideas or «strokes of genius».

In the elaboration of the final design of Cobi the first part of the work was carried out by the Quod design team, di-

2. Montero, Rosa, *El País*, supplement N.º 29, Sept. 9th 1991, «La ética y la estética» («Ethics and Aesthetics»).

3. López, Júlia, interview with Mariscal: «Cobi is an adorable friend». *La Libreta*, N.º 24, May 3rd 1991.

rected by Josep Maria Trias (author of the logotype), and later the incorporation of collaborators from Mariscal's Studio took place. The participation of these professionals cooperating with Mariscal in the re-elaboration of the initial project has made the diverse applications possible and has meant a substantial improvement of its aspect.

Rationality or charisma?

Mariscal's design has been presented to us as an unequivocal sign of the modernity and avantgardism of Barcelona in 1992. The COOB representatives wagered in favour of an avantgarde design. The Cobi figure is, in a certain sense, impregnated with the charismatic character of its creator.

In spite of the fact that Barcelona's intention is to sell (or try to sell) modernity, it is nevertheless curious that the decisions taken in relation to image and design, basically the choice of the mascot and the logotype, were disjoint decisions. An example of this are the setbacks and vicissitudes encountered by the Jury responsible of choosing the mascot, who, nevertheless, chose the logotype presented by Josep Maria Trias unanimously almost from the beginning. The people in charge of the image section of the COOB themselves admit that the graphic image of Barcelona '92 was not based on a preconceived idea. Curiously, the election of the Mariscal design and the rest of the Barcelona '92 symbols does not seem to be based on a very deliberate plan. The criteria for choosing the mascot and the logotype did not converge very much at all. Amongst other things, it is obvious that the mascot (by Mariscal) and the logotype (by Josep Maria Trias) are a response to diverse conceptions of design. There is a clear divergence between the logotype and the mascot: however, this does not represent a problem since each one is assigned a different function.

In the application of the olympic symbols the intention has been to achieve maximum coherence. And this is how we must interpret the fact that the COOB representative initially gave Josep Maria Trias and his design team the task of carrying out the «normalization» and volumetrics of the mascot.⁴ However, most of the posterior applications of the Cobi—like the corporative Cobis— have been produced by the Mariscal Studio.

Especially in the case of the mascot, it is obvious that within the world of design a wager has been made in favour of «genius», a wager for an avantgarde design. Those responsible of the COOB cater to the tradition of design in Catalonia; however, there is the «Tradition of the New» which can only come from the work and personality of someone with great charisma. They chose the work of a graphist very well connected with the elite of international design and who would contribute, even with only his signature, important added benefits to his «child». Mariscal has done much work in Japan and is very wellknown in the elite circles of design in the United States.

In spite of the fact that before the Cobi Mariscal was not wellknown by the general public, he was a very popular fig-

4. Another reason that can justify this decision is that, due to Mariscal's unfortunate comments, the COOB chose another designer to carry out the task of normalizing the Cobi.

ure in the circles of design. The chance of designing the olympic mascot has allowed him to consolidate and extend his prestige. It is symptomatic that at the time of publication of the first Cobi drawings, most designers were already in favour of Mariscal's design. The experts' attitude is in clear contrast—as is many times the case—to popular response, since most of the population did not like the mascot designed by Mariscal.

From underground to masscult

The Cobi is an innovating cultural product, «something strange» without too many points of reference in the history of sports mascots or in the history of figures or animated drawings or comics. The drawing is made—as argued by some members of the jury responsible of choosing the mascot—in a clearly avantgarde and rupturist line. The point was to break away from the tradition of the «bland figures» that take after the typical Walt Disney-type characters. In this sense, Mariscal's proposal is clearly rupturist. More than being a response to an avantgarde spirit, however, the drawing of Cobi has its origin in the drawings and figures of fiction created in the «countercultural» and anticlassicist tradition of the underground comic. It is in this sense that we believe it is inexact and misleading to relate Cobi with the naïf drawings of Picasso, even if they may have a certain formal affinity. The relation of Mariscal's work with the avantgardes of the beginning of the century is accidental and would require a more profound analysis.⁵

In fact, Mariscal's drawing of Cobi is directly inspired on the *Garriris* and, more specifically, on the *Perro Julián*, figures created by Mariscal during the time of his collaboration with the comics magazine *El Víbora*.

It isn't so clear that the figures created by Mariscal are such a radical break from the Walt Disney tradition. For example, Mariscal has copied Disney's tendency towards anthropomorphism.

There was something of a coarse Walt Disney in the adventures of the *Garriris*, a drunken and festive Disney who dreams of screwing the Gilda sisters on any beach in the Maresme.⁶

Mariscal himself expresses his acknowledgement for the work of Walt Disney:

For me, the fascinating thing about Disney is his capacity for organizing large teams or groups of people and giving them support and energy so that they will come to love their work, investigate and maintain emotional relationships with the figures they create, so that they'll move just as they want them to, go farther than anyone else; to make a team work together to create products that will succeed insofar as colours, sound, ambientation, scripts, lighting

5. However, to understand Mariscal's relation with the creators of the Underground comic requires a more profound study.

6. España, Ramón de, «El hombre que no se corta una peseta» («The man with no hairs on his tongue»), monographic number of the *De Diseño* magazine (1986) dedicated to Mariscal.

and setting. In spite of having great technical and economical determinants there is a great deal of love in his work, respect and passion for the well-finished product, love of good work.⁷

As we have already seen, Mariscal's mascot is also inspired (however remotely) by the *gos d'atura*, a race of dogs typical of the Catalan Pyrenees. In spite of this, according to Mariscal himself, Cobi is not like the *Perro Julián* («a dog-dog»); Cobi has lost his hair and his tail, and he walks on two legs, adopting an anthropomorphic aspect. Metaphorically speaking we could say that Cobi is in a very advanced stage in the process of evolution and personification, and this turns him into a talking figure (close to *Snoopy* and other almost human figures, very frequently seen in television cartoon shows).⁸

Mariscal «superstar»

Another significant aspect is how the Mariscal figure has been treated, especially in the social communication media. Loyal to his origins as an underground creator, Mariscal is a multifaceted author who conceives artistic creation in a playful and insignificant sense and, through his work, he portrays or reflects an urban environment in a state of full efferescence and constant movement.

He is Cobi's father, 41 years old, and has been painting since childhood. He started drawing underground comics in 1973 with the *Rollo Enmascarado*, and has now become an international star in the field of design, a prolific and multifaceted artist who does anything from painting a picture to drawing a carpet; he decorates discotheques, makes furniture, designs tiles, handbags and T-shirts or the façade of a bank. At present he is in contact with Mr. George Lucas, the one from *Star Wars*, to produce a cartoon or animated movie.⁹

Two years before the election of Mariscal's mascot in a monographic number of the *De Diseño* magazine entirely dedicated to Mariscal, Antoni Marí writes the following words of praise about Mariscal:

7. Mariscal, X, «Walt Disney. For it», *El País*, Nov. 30th 1991, Cultural magazine «Babelia», N.º 7.

8. Mariscal does not consider him a ludic character. Cobi is a normal figure with a special talent for discretion. He is a figure with a very high sense of companionship and, at the same time, does not stand out from the group, a character who never wins. (Mariscal doesn't like the Cobi produced by the Estrella Dorada beer brand, who drinks beer while sitting on the roof of a car. He has a very special conscientiousness in relation to the different applications of Cobi.) Cobi is a sort of antihero born according to the image and aspect of Mariscal himself. Even in the Cobi cartoon show, Cobi does not become the Olympic mascot till the sixth chapter, when he is discovered by the Gods of Olympus, who decide they like him and name him the mascot. Cobi comes from the world of underground comics and Mariscal loves to return him to his world of origin (it is very clear that this comic is very official and very little underground).

9. Montero, Rosa, «La ética y la estética» («Ethics and Aesthetics»), *El País*, supplement N.º 29, Sept. 9th 1991.

The attractive thing about Mariscal, his art, his strength, his intelligence is having created a world that registers the shape, colour, movement, fate and memory of an urban and contemporary society such as ours.¹⁰

One of Mariscal's constant obsessions is the desire to bring objects to life.

During the past decade, Mariscal has invented a kind world, the product of a certain nostalgia of innocence that has slowly emerged from the flat surface of the pages of comics and acquired not only volume but also utility. This artist has produced a great deal of offspring amongst which—along with a diversity of playful, funny, weird figures of all sorts of charming species—there are many objects that have ended up furnishing our home and the homes of many other people around the world. An emblem of the new Barcelona, Cobi finally emerges as the sum of this nostalgia for childhood and the work of a total artist whose imaginative ingenuity has had the wisdom to give way to the necessary business cunning.

It is not casual that Mariscal has come to be popularly known as the creator of characters (first the *Garriris* and the *Perro Julián*, and later Cobi) that acquire a life of their own and go beyond the desires of their creator.

The characters themselves create their own situation and history, their own homes, lives and companions...¹¹

This desire to bring objects to life has led Mariscal to break the conventional barriers that separate the different creative fields and lavish his collaborations in the world of comics, illustrations, design, drawing and painting.

Mariscal could have specialized in drawing comics but it was obvious that this wasn't enough for him. For this reason he began to design furniture, decorate bars or plan prints for clothes and fabrics.¹²

Cobi's creator, a public figure at once candid and «enfant terrible», is one of the few authors who has allowed himself, to a great extent, to «say» and «do» whatever he wants.

I believe his secret is a certain astute mixture of intuition and brazenness, he has made a creative mayonnaise that never curdles and is always surprising.¹³

We have the impression that one of Mariscal's—«the man who never bites his tongue»—great qualities is and has been his great conviction and selfassurance and the fact that he is untiring when it comes to work. At the same time he has always had a great facility for promoting himself. Mariscal has

10. Marí, Antoni, «*De Diseño*», N.º 10, 1986.

11. Montero, Rosa, «La ética y la estética» («Ethics and Aesthetics»), *El País*, supplement No. 29, Sept. 9th 1991.

12. España, Ramón de, «El hombre que no se corta una peseta» («The man with no hairs on his tongue»), monographic number of the revista *De Diseño* (1986) dedicated to Mariscal.

13. España, Ramón de, *ibid.*

known how to reconcile two apparently contradictory poles of his artistic and professional personality: on the one hand, the critical and innovating creative genius; on the other, the designer who is obedient and obsequious to the industry of culture. Not only has Mariscal himself known how to play his role but also the press, who have presented and accentuated a profile that clearly shows this constant ambivalence between genius and marketing ability. Mariscal himself admits this:

I produce things that are sold as art when they are really commercial products, and others that are sold as commercial products when in reality they are art (Mariscal, 1991).

However, Mariscal does not relinquish the benefits that come from being an artist. In spite of having come to be wellknown thanks to his work in fields such as design or comics, socially considered «minor arts», we must not forget that Mariscal has also carried out his activity in areas such as painting and engraving. In the last exposition of his paintings held in Barcelona in February 1992, his works of art (which sold very rapidly) were sold at prices that went from 400.000 to 600.000 pesetas.

It can be thought-provoking to analyze Cobi, especially at the beginning, when he appeared as a «brilliant» product of the Mariscal brand. The press has wanted to reinforce the charismatic value of the Mariscal character. Their treatment of the subject has only reinforced the prestige that he already had in circles that were closer to the world of design and made it extensive to the «public at large». In this sense, a good symptom is the exposition organized in Valencia, «100 años con Mariscal»,¹⁴ and later taken to Barcelona under the name «Cent anys a Bar-cel-ona». We considered this exposition as an attempt to sacralize or give prestige—in spite of the ironical tone of the meeting—to all the work produced by Mariscal.

3. THE ANTI-COBI

Cobi is an emblematic image that very effectively identifies the Barcelona '92 Olympic Games. Its communicative force has led it to be assimilated and even used by groups or individuals who are contrary to the Games.

The mascot's function is to be the visual representation and identification of the Olympic Games. So far we have studied the diverse official uses and functions assigned to the mascot which have been promoted or authorized by the COOB. In this chapter we will analyze the extraofficial or contestatory uses made of the Barcelona '92 Games mascot. Beyond its diversity, Cobi always represents the same Olympic event. The COOB reserves itself the right of reproducing

14. «100 años con Mariscal» («100 years with Mariscal») was organized in Valencia by the Minister of Industry Andreu Garcia Reche, and later we found a sponsor, the Pamesa tile company in Valencia. According to Mariscal it was very successful because it was very well organized. Júlia López, interview with Mariscal: «Cobi is an adorable friend». *La Llibreta*, No. 24, May 3rd 1991.

the mascot and the logotype of Barcelona '92 for commercial purposes, and it also has legal and juridical tools to defend its right. Cobi is a patented product that demands strict control so that it will not be used by anyone without a royalty and the corresponding authorization. As confirmed, the cases of industrial falsification have been rigorously pursued and sanctioned. As far as the COOB is concerned there is only one Cobi, their Cobi, the legal one. In a Julio Iglesias concert a Cobi was used without permission and the COOB acted rapidly and forcefully.

This type of behaviour has possibly limited and discouraged popular appropriation of the mascot. The image rights of a character as illustrious as Cobi must be preserved at any cost.

Paradoxically, while it carries out its genuine function as the ludical representation of the Olympic Games, it has also served many groups as an antisymbol symbol. All they've had to do is distort Cobi's aspect, dress him up, transvestite him, change his features and the sign of the message is automatically altered.

This ease of reproduction of the mascot is what J. M. Cadena wrote about a few days after it was published:

Mariscal's drawing—that dog, or whatever it is—has the incredible advantage that, once awarded the prize, any graphic artist can reproduce it. In this sense, Mariscal is a putative father or a hired out mother. His personal gesture is so participational and his aesthetic vision is so ordinary that there are many who can take part and improve it.¹⁵

This image that identifies the Games has been used to demonstrate and evidence certain criticisms or attitudes against the Games. The anti-Cobi, the denial of Cobi, expresses a rejection or negation of the Olympic Games that it represents. This use was also made evident with the symbol of the Barcelona '92 nomination for the Games. As a sign of denial, all you had to do was put an N in front the olympic rings.

It seems that this «alternative» use (practiced mainly by anarchist groups or groups of Catalan independentists) proves a certain acceptance of Cobi as a symbol of Barcelona '92. The logotype designed by Josep Maria Trias has not, in this sense, had the same effect as Cobi. The ambivalence of this emblem that serves both to praise and enforce the olympic spirit, as well as to deny and condemn the Olympics, proves its great capacity of communication. Its strong graphic force and the candid and helpless character of the figure has motivated and, paradoxically, permitted its use by groups who are critical or contrary to the Olympic Games; they have made use of the image of the mascot (the anti-Cobi) as an emblem in their graphic campaigns and advertising against the Games, or they have used a template of the Cobi as a critical reference to the organization of the Games. The controversial figure of Mariscal and his origin as an underground creator have probably favoured this ambiguous love/hate relation towards the mascot. The creature created by Mariscal has thus returned to its «countercultural» origins and has recovered his subversive capacity.

This critical and ambiguous way of receiving the mascot

15. Cadena, J.M., «El apaño», *El Periódico*, March 21st 1988.

was evidenced by the written press, even before the mascot was published. For example, in some of the letters to the editor published in the *Avui* (Feb. 24th 1988) it was suggested that Cobi was, from the point of view of the citizens of Catalonia, a joke, a way of pulling everyone's leg. In one letter of opinion they insisted on naming it *Nyap* (Blunder) (Feb. 26th 1988): «With all our being so progressive in design, so futuristic and rupturist, and we are not capable of adopting a name as representative as *Nyap*.»

On the other hand, in an article published in the pages of *El País* newspaper, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán was one of the most inspired spokesmen in favour of the olympic mascot at a time when the immense majority of the population thought that Cobi was a «horrible little dog». Ironically, Montalbán points out Cobi's virtues against official Catalonia and Spain:

I like the mascot because it reminds me of all my dogs that have died and it gives me hope that some day they will come back to life thanks to the grace of the lazy compassion of the Dog God. [...] But I fear that if semiologists, sociologists, philosophers and politicians wish to delve too deeply into the roots of this dog, they will end up unvertebrated and flattened out, run down by the highway of Mariscal's irony. [...] I would say that Mariscal's dog is the soul of a dog run down on the highway and turned into a paper cutout doll stuck in the ass of Spain celebrating the V Centennial and the '92 Olympic games. I simply love the idea and propose that this emblematic dog not only appear in the conventional publicity supports or media, but also that a special edition be made of paper cutout mascots; every olympic participant should carry the torch or use the torch to light a *Cohiba* in the Presidential Tribune, and later stick the paper doll in his ass and walk around with it showing the countercultural pride due to all anti-mascots.¹⁶

Also in the pages of *El Periódico* newspaper, Cándido confesses his kind feelings for Cobi and foresees the “perverse” use of the mascot:

This distorted little body clashes with the well-proportioned auras of olympic athletic bodies and thus is born, unconsciously, a sort of resentment towards the disabled [...]. He is a first rate rebel.¹⁷

Cobi's easy reproduction and his expressive force have turned him into the star of graffiti, comics, public protests against drugs and antiolympic vindications. A curious immediate identification phenomenon by which the Cobi has become a perfect poker for all the countercultural or «alternative» movements. This image of a «distorted» Cobi has been used for making stickers, outdoor mural paintings, graffiti, underground comic drawings, criticising or with attitudes contrary to the Games. This critical use of the mascot expresses, even if paradoxically, a certain acceptance and assimilation of the mascot. However, there are several

«countercultural» uses of the mascot that can be summarized in four groups:

1. The popular and vindicational appropriation of the Cobi by groups and associations who found in Cobi's synthetic profile a simple and impacting shape, easily recognizable by everyone. A Cobi who shows himself as being solidary with «the tribe» and actively takes part in popular campaigns and vindications against drugs (the junkie Cobi), against terrorism (the Corcuera Cobi), etc. Obviously, this «unorthodox» application of the mascot expresses a certain degree of assimilation of Cobi as a totemic figure.

2. Secondly, the use of a Cobi that has been transformed starting out from attributes which contradict those of the «official Cobi», which presents an eminently ludic character. For example, the «police Cobi» has a surprise effect and the aim of unmasking the Olympic Games.

We have already shown that the Cobi can play different roles, since it has the great ability to transform itself: it can even be in police dress.

3. There are other versions of the Cobi, which are recognized as having a personality which transcends his official, formal conduct. There is, for example, a mad Cobi with obscene gestures, and a smart Cobi busying himself with speculation and taking advantage of the Olympic event in order to get rich quick.

4. Finally, the use of the anti-Cobi Cobi. This Cobi appears as a character without personality or as a stray dog, deprived of all its charm and converted into the propitiatory victim of the anger of radical, protesting groups. One can find, for example, a hanged Cobi (hanged by independence groups) or a beaten-up Cobi (the victim of anarchist groups). Taken to extremes, we can even find a burned Cobi, as if he were a flag. This ritual sacrifice of the Olympic mascot stands for the symbolic destruction of the enemy. It is not a coincidence that it has been the nationalist groups that have burnt a Cobi as if they were burning a Spanish flag.

16. Vázquez Montalbán, M., «El alma de un perro atropellado en una autopista de peaje». («The soul of a dog run down on a highway»), *El País*, March 3rd 1988.

17. Cándido, «El símbolo», *El Periódico*, March 19th 1988.