

IN DEFENCE OF COBI



CoBi

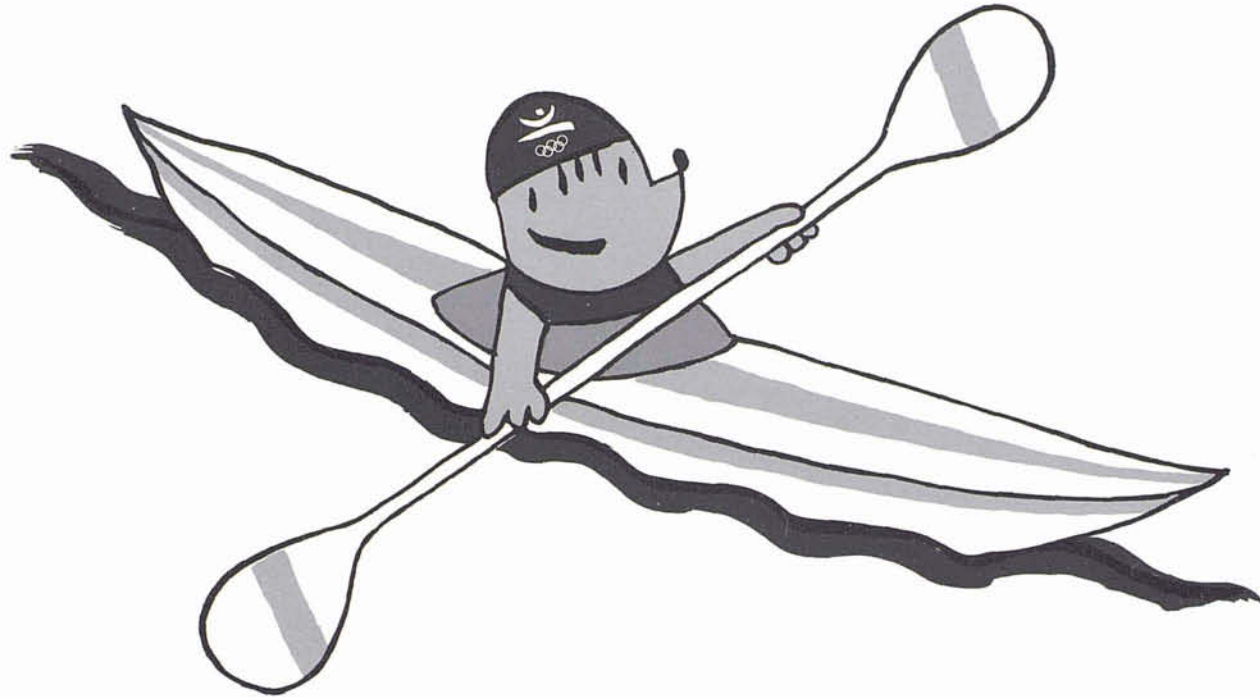


Barcelona '92

Jocs de la XXVa Olimpíada Barcelona 1992 Juegos de la XXV Olimpiada Barcelona 1992 Jeux de la XXVe Olympiade Barcelona 1992 Games of the XXV Olympiad Barcelona 1992

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I couldn't understand the declared disappointment, the almost angry perplexity of not a few citizens of all walks of life and mounted too, as they contemplated those first pictures of the mascot of the Barcelona games.

In raptures at the avant-garde aesthetic, at COBI's simple, postmodern joviality, I went out into the streets, the campuses and the pubs, launching into the domestic, university and even bureaucratic atmospheres the question that tormented me.

The replies were no less disappointing than the impressions declared by citizens on foot or motorized in their wall-less classrooms or their oral newspapers.

"I had hoped for something different; like Donald Duck, or something like that."

"I'd have liked something more typical of round here or of the country, like 'Naranjito' but better."

"I don't understand that scrawl. Mariscal's pulling our legs."

Prescribed replies coloured with Americanoid publicity, clichéed replies echoing with ethno-centrist idiosyncracies; angered replies of inconsistent unconscious.

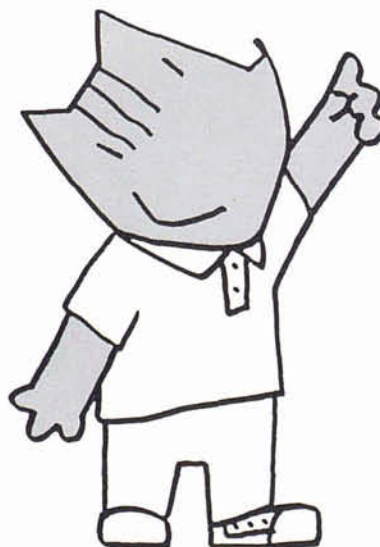
My reply, in the light of everyday semiotics, of a new science of coffee and buttered toast and signs, is the outline of an idea to try to explain to myself—and anyone who wants to read me with a critical sense—the essence at once figurative and non-figurative, the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic conception of the end-of-century Olympic mascot. Why COBI and not Donald or Pluto or Woody Woodpecker? Why a smiling, deconstructed profile and not a sau-

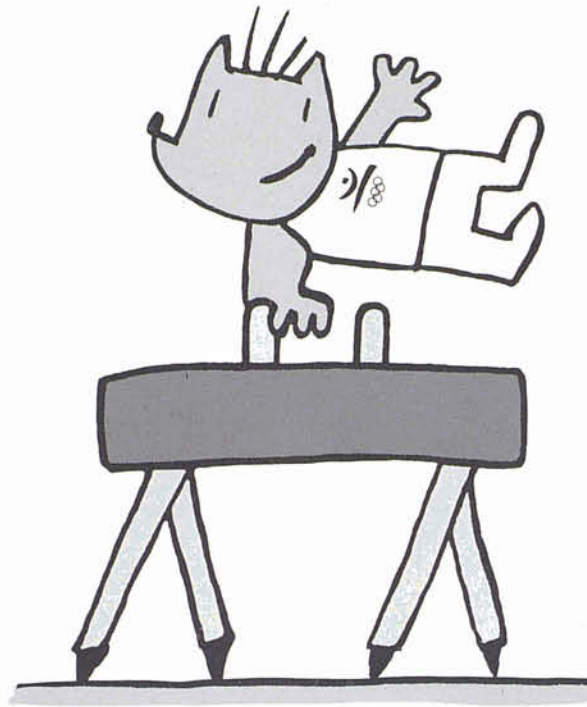
sage with eyes or an orange in football shorts?

COBI, certainly, is different and difficult to place in the usual fauna of mascots: teddy bears, tiger cubs, kittens; a chicken dressed as a sailor, a rabbit with carrot included.

Anyone who demands a zoological superman on a background of stars and stripes is a bit confused: Walt Disney created Pluto, Donald and Co. in 1927. Sixty years later Mariscal could hardly honour the aberrant practice of the de-contextualized pastiche. His design is a de-configured character, different to all that has gone before, a new expression of a new expression, very much his, very much ours, very much of our age, at once ecological and anti-ecological, ethical and anti-ethical—in a word, postmodern.

The significance of the design is as complex as it is accessible to the widest possible range of sensibilities, although the opinions thrown out with all the rest might seem to suggest the opposite. Even a four-year-old can reproduce that smiling, deformed and oh-so-simple outline of his friend depicted in endless illustrations, comics, school textbooks, sports clothes, beach bags, satchels... Many have finally had to con-





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fess: once they began to get familiar with that childlike smile they fell for COBI, he's a part of them, of us, of everybody.

This significant that smiles openly at us, with amusing complicity, encloses in his carelessly drawn little body a rich system of significative units:

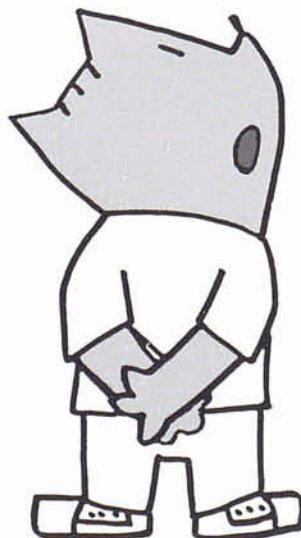
the modernity expressed in the extreme simplicity of the line, the deconstruction of the anthropomorphic figure through the skilful superimposition of an animal outline with an endearingly human expression.

the joviality, skilfully achieved through the arrangement, in a face full of expressivity, of exaggeratedly vertical eyes, parallel to the childlike fringe, and a long mouth undulating with an unmistakable smile. The movement of the arms and legs help to contribute all the playful and humanist content of the Olympic Festival, with all the strength needed by its message of unity between peoples and nations.

The difficult conjunction of the Catalan and the Universal, two significative features whose apparent opposition has been brilliantly resolved from the figurative standpoint: COBI as an anthropomorphic configuration of the *gos d'altura*, the sheep dog of the Catalan

Pyrenees that expresses the historico-geographical spatiality providing the setting for an essentially universalist Celebration.

The canine structure of the head, through the outline formed by the schematically conceived and drawn ears and muzzle, help to de-con-figure what would be a realist representation of the human head. The jovial expression arising from the internal elements and the body's different postures and attitud-



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des ensure the anthropomorphic reception and provoke an aesthetic effect of sympathy, a 'euphoric ethos' which can be picked up by those receptors who are attentive and profound, sensitive and critical, different and diverse.

The best evidence of the universality of COBI is the understanding he met with on the other side of the planet: not only did Japan greet the mascot with the deconstructed smile in a spirit of art and intelligence, it even incorporated into its everyday world logotypes and mascots of the 'father of the creature', omnipresent symbols of universal communication and of a new, unmistakably cosmopolitan aesthetic.

The Shinkansen, the Japanese high-speed train, with the fleetingness of the ultra-post-modern, will carry the signic mark of Javier Mariscal, "a noted artist of the end of the second millennium"*.

* PATON, V., "Templo de Fortuna. Un Mariscal Hispano", ARQUITECTURA VIVA, No.1, 1988, p. 36.

