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# DESIGN: PROMOTION AND IDENTITY OF BARCELONA'92

Due to the influence of my architect father, in the mid fifties I had the chance to experience the beginning of renewing design activity in Barcelona. Forty years later, I cannot cease to be surprised that the movement which I experienced as such an exceptional and incipient event has become one of the main characterizing elements of our cultural identity and international image.

Since the first expositions by the «R» Group in the Galleries Laietanes, in 1952 and 1954, to present-day headlines and comments in the international press there is a long distance, much richer in social and cultural dimensions than its actual length in time.

The historians of our «mass» or «everyday» culture will discover the roots of the «Barcelona-design» phenomenon in the artistic avantgarde movements of modernism (as a matter of fact, at least internationally, Gaudí appears as a live cause of the creativity of present-day Catalan design) or in the successive needs of modernization, marking a difference in relation to the cultural setback of the rest of the peninsula, or the backwardness of many of our most ancestral customs.

Among these causes, which we will have to analyze in more detail, I would like to single out the one I have experienced in a most existential way: the creative force of present-day design is, in the end, the result of the long period of cultural opposition against the Franco Regime.

In his book *Dit i fet*, Oriol Bohigas describes how, in 1954, the members of the «R» Group had to «convince a group of businessmen and producers [...] to introduce in their expositions a first repertoire of industrial design when people were barely beginning to get acquainted with this activity which has later acquired so much importance». In the same book, Bohigas describes an anecdote which in many ways helped to shape my own way of walking through the streets of Barcelona and becoming acquainted with it. He refers to the answer given by the architect Mister Pevsner to a Barcelona journalist during one of his visits to the city in the fifties. According to Pevsner, what he liked less about Barcelona was the view at eye level: shop windows, signs, advertisements, mailboxes, benches, etc.

Bohigas remembers that in Barcelona in those days «there were no graphic artists, or window dressers, or designers, or dressmakers, or decorators who weren't merely de-professionalized subproducts for a very mediocre industry and craftsmanship».

Architect Mister Pevsner, on the other hand, had been the consultant for the London subway signposting system. He was the example between two worlds, both politically and culturally.

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An extended version of this subject can be found in the book by the same author, *Los Juegos de la comunicación. Las múltiples dimensiones comunicativas de los Juegos Olímpicos*, Fundesco, Madrid, 1992.

Design in Barcelona was still a language for minorities, a question of opposition; for this reason, in the families of these pioneers everything had to be «R», even the most familiar prints and documents, in opposition to the general trend of things offered in the market and proposed by the majority, the dominating opinion.

Seen after so many years and still feeling surprised or astonished, with the international press publishing headlines that speak of «Barcelona and design», I believe we can interpret this phenomenon as a result of the historical recovery of cultural and artistic values long reclaimed and reflected upon, which had very scarce possibilities of being applied during the days of dictatorship.

Many hours of discussion, of comparing ideas, of clarification or criticism, of conceptual cleansing of contradictions but, on the other hand, very little time and opportunities for putting these things into practice.

From the point of view of cultural analysis there also seems to be some truth in what Isidre Molas said about the political reasons for the nomination of Barcelona for the Olympic Games; he believed there was a need to find reasons for which to move forward, to emerge once again, to go ahead.

The Games have been a magnificent opportunity for expression and communication, not only for the creation of diverse messages but also for the chance of doing it with the certainty of having an incomparable worldwide audience. The phenomenon of design cannot be separated from the phenomenon of the «new look» towards design.

The wager in favour of design was one of the strongest ideas within the limited possibilities of the anti-Franco movement, since it was based on a series of ideas that could be expressed in a symbolic non-linguistic way. This is a wellknown fact in the sociology of Catalan culture.

But Mister Pevsner was not right about everything, for there was something even uglier than the view at eye level as you walked through the streets: what you could read —or could not read— in the censored newspapers published at the time.

Design offered the possibility of expression in a defiant and non-conformist way. It shouldn't surprise us, therefore, that the first people dedicated to «semiotics» in Barcelona, as opposed to those in Paris, Milan or London, were architects, designers and art critics.

Once the dictatorship has been overcome, all this potential is faced with an unsuspected possibility: that of being put into practice with the support of public initiative and with the whole world watching.

In this context, the Games are not only a magnificent opportunity for carrying out the projects but also for doing so in front of a qualified audience. Design thus provided the plot of a great performance on the capacity of «Barcelona» to combine creativity with industrial and professional competence, absolutely essential in order to position ourselves within the new competitive map of modern Europe.

## DESIGNING THE GAMES AND DESIGNING THANKS TO THE GAMES

In economical terms, but also in terms of design, the Olympic Games imply, at least, two different types of actions: one type directly related to their organization and which is absolutely necessary, and another type that favours an improvement in the organization although it is not directly involved in it.

Both have determined multiple actions in the field of design. Among the first, for example, we can consider the design of the Olympic Torch or the symbol of Barcelona'92, and among the second, the construction of the new airport or the Olympic Village, or the design of the new public lighting devices.

The reference to designs that are specifically necessary for the celebration of the Games will be an important part of our analysis, divided into several types and categories, but we will also have to add, as in the case of the economical analysis of the Games, the «induced» design, an indirect promotional consequence, which characterizes the new international image of Barcelona.

## THE DESIGN OF THE SYMBOLS: THEIR CULTURAL AND MARKET VALUE

I will refer now to a specific area of olympic design that has acquired great importance not only in relation to Barcelona but also, in a more general way, in relation to the international olympic movement: communication and graphic design.

When interpreting the «Barcelona'92» phenomenon we must not forget that the modern olympic movement has witnessed the growth in importance of graphic design, especially as a consequence of its incidence on the Games' commercialization processes.

These processes of symbolic association, which are graphically resolved, are in themselves one of the main ways of financing of the Games.

The starting point for all this olympic symbology lies in the symbols of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) which are, by extension, the identity symbols of the international olympic movement: olympic flag, rings, representation of the torch, slogan and himn.

But the 1991 Olympic Chart defines the five rings, basis of the olympic image, as a basically graphic symbol: «five olympic rings, portrayed alone and using one or several colours»; «the group forms a regular trapezium-type shape in which the smaller base lies on the baseline or lower part of the diagram»; «the olympic symbol represents the union of the five continents and the meeting of the whole world's athletes at the Olympic Games» (chapter 1, rule 12).

These rings, portrayed according to the requirements of the design techniques described in a manual of rules or norms, have made a great fortune and are at present one of the most universally wellknown and valued symbols, both graphically and culturally.

The rings generate a whole series of diverse forms of institutional and corporative «representations». The rings are

used for referring generically to the olympic movement or the IOC, but the rings themselves can be associated with other symbols in order to represent two other main reference groups: the National Olympic Committees (NOC) and the Olympic Games of every new Olympiad.

### Site symbol or logotype

The changes in the visualization of corporative images, and also the economical importance of the applications of these images, have meant that at present we cannot conceive the organization of an olympiad without the concurrence of a personalized and unique sign of identity.

In fact, one of the first acts carried out by the Olympic nominees is the approval and presentation of the design of their «logotype» to the media. Having a «logotype» is equivalent to possessing a public identity and, in many cases, it means giving «semantics» to something that as yet does not exist or possess any institutional content.

The specific symbols of every new olympic organizing site have three main components:

- olympic symbol (five rings);
- specific symbol for every new olympic site;
- specific logotype for every new olympic site.

Considering that the denomination “logotype” does not cover all this complexity we will call this group the «site symbol».

The «site symbol» acts as a matrix element for the complete «corporative» identity of the Games. The quality and singularity of its design is also a good reason for its posterior commercialization.

Its stylistic basis, its shapes and colours, represent the starting point for the development of a whole set of interventions in the fields of signposting, looks, stationer material, posters, identifications, publicity, etc. which will shape the image of the Games.

The growing importance of the site symbols within the identification processes of the Olympic Games is easily visible if one studies the historical evolution of olympic posters.

The first «site symbol» of a clearly corporative nature in the history of the Olympic Games was the symbol of Tokio'64, created by Yusaku Kamekura; the symbol of Tokio, with the Japanese flag connotation, is used with many different media and, for the first time, on the badges that we now call pins.

The site symbol of Mexico'68, created by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, follows this tradition. But its image is no longer limited to illustrating publications and posters, but rather begins to be applied to other decorative elements and for creating a certain atmosphere.

For the first time we are face to face with an integral program of «olympic identity» which is systematically applied to the design of objects as diverse as the decoration of buildings, signals and signs, clothes, official vehicles or the typography of news and information.

The program of image design created by Otl Aicher, director of the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm for the Mu-

nich'72 Games, is an exceptional example that is still studied in specialized schools today.

The assignment entrusted to Otl Aicher was the creation of a homogeneous but varied conception of an image with a visual brand addressed to all visitors and applicable to all media (paper, dossiers, look, wardrobe, posters, souvenirs, etc) and all contents necessary for the organization of the Games.

With worse or better luck this tradition has continued in Montreal'76, Moscow'80, Los Angeles'84, Seul'88 and finally the Barcelona'92 Games.

The site symbol of Barcelona'92, created by Josep Maria Trias, which was preceded by the long and important existence of the «nomination» symbol, created by the designer América Sánchez, fulfils three main communicative functions: one of a cultural nature, proposing a certain identity and aesthetic line for Barcelona, another of an identifying and referential nature, allowing the unification of the multiple messages and elements of organization of the Games, and finally a third function that must not be left out: allowing the great commercial process entailed by the sale of the olympic image rights.

The design created by Josep Maria Trias, as has been admitted by the author himself (Trias, 1992), assumed the connotations characteristic of the Mediterranean culture, universally acknowledged through the field of painting and especially the work of Miró.

This symbol adds the use of the manual outline and the representation of the human figure to the history of olympic graphic art. This mobility and anthropomorphism allow the design of all the pictograms of the olympic sign system and, at the same time, are an adequate expression of the humanistic ideals that the olympic movement seeks.

The symbol produced by Josep Maria Trias was chosen by means of a restricted contest among the proposals presented by a total of six prestigious graphic designers: América Sánchez, Cruz Novillo, Rolando, Satué, Trias and Zimmermann (Caparrós, Capella, Palacios, 1988).

This choice effectively solved one of the main cultural challenges of Barcelona'92: presenting itself to the world as a city of design, a creative city in accordance with its humanist tradition and its prestige as the cradle of avantgarde art. The symbol created by Josep Maria Trias will probably be historical, and not only insofar as design applied to the Olympic Games, but also in the history of international graphic design.

### Cobi, a commercial and avantgarde mascot

The mascot, like the symbol, has to carry out different communication functions; it must represent a cultural project and, at the same time, be cost-effective and comercial.

An important executive in the marketing department of the IOC confessed to me that the Cobi had been the best mascot in olympic history; its cultural value, logically, is still the object of open discussion and polemics.

Cobi design, however, has the indisputable value of being a quality and avantgarde design, clearly breaking away from the acritical conformism of the commercial culture that has so far been the usual trend in the world of sports and olympic sponsoring.

The mascot and the symbol have a common objective or point of reference: the identification of the Games for every Olympiad. But in order to do so they must use very different semiotic resources: the mascot, of a more personalized or «animalized» nature, must carry out the task of easing the processes of identification and the transmission of festive, euphoric, subjective messages. The site symbol has the function of institutional representation and the transmission of more institutional, historical and cultural values.

The mascot is more easily adapted to popular tastes and uses. In the hands of its owners it can be turned into a personalized «you» that consequently allows for imaginary dialogue, jokes, play. The mascot is a toy doll that children can embrace or take to bed with them, it is a «live» being that allows the creation of multiple stories, identifications and which can be present in multiple actions and scenarios.

For all these reasons, the mascot implies great design complexity. Starting with a concept and a basic image that defines its pertinent lines, a whole set of applications must be developed; graphic and industrial designs that imply flat surfaces and three-dimensional surfaces. More than any other symbol, the mascot is graphic art as well as an object with multiple shapes and adaptations.

The predecessors of Cobi were Waldi in Munich'72, Amik in Montreal'76, Misha in Moscow'80, Sam in Los Angeles'84 and Ho-dori in Seoul'88, but Xavier Mariscal's design for Barcelona'92 breaks away from most of the established patterns; for example, the tradition of the figurative representation of animals when designing olympic mascots. Cobi ambiguously represents a «character» that is difficult to describe but with clear dog connotations and the body of a toy doll.

In spite of a certain controversy, Cobi was the result of a first consensus in the symbolic production of the Barcelona Games. It was selected by the same jury that chose the Barcelona'92 symbol, in a restricted contest in which other important artists also took part: Amat, Beaumont, Capdevila, Mariscal, Peret and Petit.

Among the alternatives to the Cobi there were several animals (dogs, dragons, rabbits, prawns, frogs, etc), and one vegetable proposal which consisted of five tomatoes and a personalized figure of the sun, Sol Olo, designed by Peret, which obtained the second prize.

The jury and the people involved in organizing the Games and, in a more extended manner, the leaders of cultural opinion, considered that the symbols of Barcelona should represent a first demonstration of the design quality of this city, understanding design quality, at least, as the capacity for applying avantgarde forms to popular mass consumer products.

The Barcelona mascot could not be a mascot made in a style similar to Walt Disney characters. Neither could it be an analogical reproduction of the most popular race of dogs in Catalonia (the *gos d'atura*).

Cobi was a product of Barcelona culture and the influence of modern avantgarde art, Picasso-type art, with the explicit desire of being informal, charming and amusing (Mariscal, 1992).

Cobi is part of a new culture of design and «gadgets» which is both rupturist and attractive.

The new rupturist aspect arose both surprise and criticisms. A member of Barcelona City Hall felt very sure of his

capacity as an art critic when he said that in his opinion the mascot was «horrible». But Cobi finally prevailed. Its nature as an open symbol allowed it to adapt to the demands of a long process of consumption and manipulation.

One reason for its success can be found in its semantic multiplicity and its capacity for interpreting characters with very diverse circumstances; it is not only an institutional and standard design, but also a contestatory and countercultural design; the Cobi is used to portray messages of protest or caricature of the official management of the Games and their significance.

## THE COMMERCIAL APPLICATION OF THE SYMBOLS

We must now insist on the fact that one of the main sources for financing modern Olympic Games comes from the sale of the rights to use the olympic symbols for commercial ends.

The commercial application of the symbols is mainly done using the following media:

- a) in the advertising of the products manufactured by the sponsoring companies;
- b) in the wrapping or packing of their products;
- c) in several decorative elements of the institutions or authorized companies;
- d) in objects produced by the licensed firms.

From the commercial point of view, the most important of these applications is advertising. The companies obtain the right to associate the olympic symbols (rings, site symbols and mascot) with their brands with the aim to improve their sales and business.

In a way very much linked to this publicitary application we must also underline the use of the olympic symbols in the packing of licensed products.

### Licensed products

The complexity of olympic marketing forces us to distinguish a special category of objects to which the olympic image is applied and which, as we have seen before, demand varied design action: I am referring to what are known as «licensed products».

These objects, the variety of which is described in an annex, use the olympic symbol to attract buyers amongst the consumer population, who purchase them as souvenirs or as objects with a certain prestige.

These objects (T-shirts, cigarette lighters, for example) can be purchased, without commercial publicity, in various shops, specialized or otherwise, but they can also be found as a means of promotion or advertising of the olympic sponsors, who have the exclusive use of these images.

The direct sale of these objects and olympic material has experienced a great growth in the past few years and is already an important source of income for the organizing committees.

Barcelona is an exception insofar as the variety of all these applications,<sup>1</sup> in the use of the site symbol, but especially of the mascot or, even more exceptionally, in the application of both to the same product.

But the symbol and the mascot can also be autonomous in the sense that they not always have to appear along with other symbols or illustrating other objects. The symbol and the mascot themselves can also be manufactured as symbolic objects.

The site symbol can be reproduced as a jewel and thus acquire multiple shapes, either flat or with volume and very different sizes.

The mascot, however, holds many more possibilities for reproduction. In the first place, as opposed to the logotype, because the mascot allows for multiple versions and forms of representation. Cobi, for example, can be a skater, a student, a ball player or a swimmer, and all this can be done in all sizes and volumes.

The most extended application is the new pin fashion as opposed to the old badges stuck on jacket lapels which only men could wear; pins can be pinned onto almost anything. «Pinmania», as it is known, has found a good field of application in the Olympic Games.

## Posters, medals, signs and other olympic symbols

Apart from the design of the basic symbols, the Olympic Games also require the design of a great variety of other symbols and messages.

Thus, for example, the edition of posters has a long olympic tradition<sup>2</sup> which has followed the development of graphic communication. The first example of olympic graphic communication dates back to the 1896 Games in Athens. Since then and until the Games in Amsterdam in 1928, the graphic image of the Games was applied to the program guide, which, at the time, carried out the representative function that was later taken up by the use of posters.

The poster for the Amsterdam Games (1928), of which 10.000 copies were printed, emblematically uses the five olympic rings for the first time, and they will not cease to be present in all the Games that have taken place after them.

Barcelona'92 has a wide program of poster edition. Four official posters have been created by Josep Maria Trias, Xavier Mariscal, Antoni Tàpies and Enric Satué, winners of a contest in which eight other participants took part, whose posters have been made into a collection of posters of Barcelona'92.

The COOB'92 has also published another series of posters of painters and official sports, as well as the posters of the pictograms of olympic sports designed by Josep Maria Trias for the olympic signposting project.

It's impossible to know the exact final number of copies printed of all these collections of posters without carrying out specific research in this sense. The total circulation of the posters is determined by the participation of the numerous

people involved: sponsors, licensed firms, communication media, who distribute hundreds of thousands of copies of these posters, etc.

The organization of the Games requires many more actions and design programs. Amongst the more important is the case of the signs that have to be put up and the looks of the city and the olympic sports facilities.

In Barcelona'92, for example, a signposting program<sup>3</sup> of sports and olympic facilities has been planned with the introduction of about 30.000 signs. For the first time, this sign system uses pictograms derived from the shapes of the site symbol, with the background in navy blue and the adaptation of the system to the four official languages (Catalan, Spanish, French and English).

In the long olympic tradition, other symbols and collectors traditions have had a great importance, for example, stamps or coins commemorating the event.

The philatelic program of Barcelona is made up of eight preolympic and one olympic series. The creation of these stamps has been carried out by artists such as Peret, Bartolozzi, Robert Llimós, Arranz Bravo, Joan Pere Viladecans, Gerard Sala and Perico Pastor, who have contributed drawings of all the official sports present in Barcelona'92.

## DESIGN AND SPONSORING

Finally, in our analysis of the functions and applications of design, I believe it is necessary to point out that all these design programs have their origin and basic function in financing and sponsoring programs.

Modern Olympic Games constitute a field of application and basic experimentation for the development of sponsoring using the new modern international communications system.

In the first place, because of its worldwide scope and monumental audience but also due to the characteristics of the development of the olympic event itself.

The association of the olympic symbols with a commercial product is a good marketing option and not only because here these commercial products manage to become associated with symbols that evoke positive aspects, but also because it allows them to improve their position in relation to their own competitors: Coca-Cola versus Pepsi-Cola, Visa versus American Express, etc.

The role of the sponsors and the olympic economy experienced a great change after the application of the new sponsoring norm in the Los Angeles'84 Games. The new logic was based on the supposition that «less» (sponsors) would be equivalent to «more» (money).

The Tokio Games were the last to be held in which the collaboration of commercial companies, sponsors, was made through contributing goods, without taking into consideration issues such as competition and exclusivity. The Los Angeles organizers (LAOOC) limited the number of sponsors to 35,

3. The olympic signposting project of Barcelona'92 has been created by a team directed by Josep Maria Trias, with the cooperation of Jordi Matas and the advice, in the field of communication, of a team directed by the author of the present article. The coordination of the project was in the hands of the semiotician Miquel Gómez.

1. COOB'92, *Productos licenciados*, COOB'92, Barcelona 1991.

2. IOC, *L'olympisme par l'affiche*, International Olympic Committee, Lausanne 1983.

with sole agents for every line of products. On that occasion the benefits were almost 100 million dollars.

After this experience, the International Olympic Committee decided to take more direct action in the regulation of this business, establishing the rights and obligations of all those involved—the International Olympic Committee, Organizing Committees, National Olympic Committees—and also establishing the prerogatives and limits that would affect the sponsors in their use of the olympic symbols.

It was considered necessary to establish the commercial and geographical conditions of this use, thus creating an international sponsoring program known as the TOP (The Olympic Program).

We must bear in mind that the Olympic Chart expressly prohibits the exhibition of the commercial symbols (static publicity) inside and outside the olympic facilities during the duration of the Games. It also forbids the exhibition of commercial brands inside the dressing rooms or on the sports equipment used by the athletes. The only thing that is accepted is the regulated association of the commercial brands with the olympic symbols in all other communication media.

In these circumstances, given these norms and the investments that all this entails, the graphic design programs acquire maximum protagonism and complexity.

The symbols designed will have to be applied to a wide range of categories of sponsors or supporting companies:

a) companies that participate in the world program of olympic sponsoring (TOP);

b) companies that take part in a specific sponsoring program of the National Olympic Committees (NOC) and can use the symbols of the corresponding National Committees;

c) companies that participate in the specific sponsoring program of each one of the Olympic Games and can use the site symbol and the mascot.

These sponsors, especially the TOP sponsors, coincide with the large multinationals of the diverse categories of large scale consumer products, capable of generating a large amount of products and messages.

The TOP program corresponding to Barcelona'92 includes the participation of the following twelve companies: Coca-Cola (soft drinks), Kodak (photography), 3M (magnetic tapes), Brooks Brother Industries (typewriters), Philips (audio, Hi-Fi), Sports Illustrated/Time (magazines), VISA (credit cards), United States Postal Service (mail service), National/Panasonic (video), Bausch & Lomb (optical, dental), Ricoh (fax), Mars (food).

Insofar as the sponsors more directly managed by the Organizing Committee of the Games, the COOB'92 in the case of Barcelona, we must distinguish four main categories, each one with different privileges in relation to the use of images:

a) Collaborating sponsors with a minimum contribution of 2.500 million pesetas, taking part in basic areas of the organization: IBM (computer technology), SEAT (automobiles), Rank Xerox (editing Systems), Telefónica (telecommunications), Alcatel (medical communication services), Banesto (financing entities), La Unió i el Fènix (insurance), Philips (electronics), El Corte Inglés (large department stores).

b) Patronage sponsors, companies that wish to associate their image to the Games and who contribute a minimum of 600 million pesetas. These sponsors correspond to sole rights for specific categories of products: Cola-Cao, Damm, Campofrío, Danone, Eds, Flex, Asics, Mizuno, Seiko, Enasa-Pegaso, Frigo, Renfe, Freixenet.

c) Provider sponsors, who contribute goods or services to the organization, with a calculated minimum contribution of 150 million pesetas.

Among the sponsors, and in other less relevant categories, we must mention the «suppliers», the «providers of sports equipment», but especially the «licensed sponsors», companies that have been granted the license to use the symbols of the Games (site symbol and mascot) for the commercialization of certain products, whose contribution is calculated according to their turnover.

One year before the Games, the COOB'92 had already granted this license to 58 companies which had produced a total of 450 different applications, not counting differences in size and colour.<sup>4</sup>

To conclude, we can say that in Barcelona'92 the cost-effectiveness of these commercial strategies is consolidated. Although we do not yet have final data on this subject, 500 days before the beginning of the Games our information was that all records had been beaten, since 540 million dollars had already been obtained by these means, a much larger sum than in Los Angeles or Seul, which had «only» made 189 and 225 million dollars, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

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4. COOB'92, «Chapter 5, financing», in *500 días para los Juegos Olímpicos, Dossier de prensa*, March 13th, 1991, COOB'92, Barcelona 1991.

5. COOB'92, *Barcelona'92, Finance & Insurance*, COOB'92, Barcelona 1991.