

**Boris Artzybasheff and the art of anthropomorphic  
marketing in early American consumer culture**

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## **Boris Artzybasheff and the art of anthropomorphic marketing in early American consumer culture**

### **Abstract**

This paper undertakes a critical historical review of the role of anthropomorphism in marketing and advertising in American consumer culture from the 1940s onwards. We review the art of the acclaimed illustrator Boris Artzybasheff who among other artistic achievements created images that regularly featured on the covers for Life, Fortune, and Time. As well as working in media, Artzybasheff also produced advertising images as well as imagery for propaganda. One of the characteristic features of Artzybasheff's commercial art is the use of anthropomorphism, especially with technology industries and products. His art spans the periods prior, during and post World War II as well as the Cold War era and the onset of modern consumer culture on America.

**Summary statement of contribution:** Our review highlights the underlying cultural work of marketing, branding and advertising to bring otherwise distant, alien and faceless products and ideas into a communicable realm for human action, behavior, imagination and buying. Anthropomorphism can be legitimately considered as an important mechanism through which post war market economy and industrial modernity became a consumer culture. The paper highlights the contribution of historical analysis and value of considering artistic work for understanding the development of marketing.

**Keywords:** Anthropomorphism, advertising, technology, history, marketing

## **Introduction**

The perception that non human agents embody or develop humanlike characteristics penetrates metaphysical, material and technological spheres. Once anthropomorphised these agents acquire the capability to exert considerable influence, to be treated with consideration and even ethical concern (Waytz, Epley & Cacioppo, 2010). As Guthrie (1995) remarks in his classic work on anthropomorphism and religion, the attribution of human characteristics to non-human springs from people's need to search for organization and exchange of symbolic meaning that adds significance to everyday life. This process manifests itself in a variety of forms which construct and inconspicuously define daily cognitive, linguistic and behavioural realms of thought and inquiry. This helps to explain our curses and frustrations directed at unresponsive traffic lights, our description of financial-markets to be 'cyclothymic', 'anxious', 'tentative' or 'delirious', and our reactions to the attacks we endure from hurricanes and storms, to which we give names and attribute all kinds of malicious intent. Natural forces, mechanical devices, spiritual deities and mascots are only the most obvious examples where human imagination has sought to attribute humanlike mental states, actions, traits and attitudes to nonhuman agents. Marketing theorists have given relatively limited attention to a phenomenon that has otherwise been extensively reviewed by philosophers, natural and social scientists (Epley, Waytz & Cacioppo, 2007; Guthrie, 1995; Kennedy, 1992), advertising and marketing are also obvious sites for anthropomorphism (Brown, 2010). This study focuses on early examples of anthropomorphic marketing and branding, drawing on the work of the American illustrator, advertiser, commercial and magazine artist Boris Artzybasheff whose career spanned from the 1920s to the 1960s. A champion of anthropomorphic illustrations, Artzybasheff's considerable body of work appeared

in advertisements, war campaigns and cover magazines. It offers fascinating insights on the use of anthropomorphic marketing during a turbulent period of American history.

### **Anthropomorphic marketing**

For Guthrie (1995) individuals employ anthropomorphism to construct a warm and friendly sense of the world. It is conceived it as process that facilitates man to experience himself in spiritual terms. The religious capacity for symbolic interaction with humanlike deities was discussed or criticized in the intersection of evolutionary theory (Darwin, 1872; Mitchell, Thompson & Miles, 1997), philosophy and particularly religion (Freud, 1939, 1946; Feuerbach, 1967) and early cultural anthropology (Frazer, 1923; Boas, 1940; Tyler, 1871/2010). At the turn of the twentieth century it seems that the impulse to find human form in the world preserved and penetrated in the domain of film industry. Since the 1920s, emerging animated technologies offered an artistic platform for a series of anthropomorphic characters based on animals, plants, machines and products. The popularity of Mickey Mouse for example, introduced in 1928, prompted Disney to develop more anthropomorphic characters. Over a span of eight decades the friendly Mickey Mouse, apart from being the official and lucrative mascot of the Walt Disney Company, has also become the advertising vehicle for the promotion of wide series of products related, among other things, to food, theme parks, technological devices and domestic appliances. Bambi, the animated white-tailed deer introduced in 1942 by Disney, loses her mother by an evil hunter known as ‘Man’ becomes the most successful symbol<sup>1</sup> against hunting and killing adorable animals. In 1989 an aggressive marketing re-launch campaign of the character was accompanied by the promotion of Crest Toothpaste and M&M candies (Lutts,

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, celebrated evolutionary biologist, has claimed that Disney animators are aware that we identify with certain animal characteristics like the large eyes of Mickey Mouse and Bambi which display neotenic features similar to that of humans. (Gould 1979 cited Daston and Mitman 2005).

1992). Disney's anthropomorphic characters designed in the 1940s have been continuously re-developed, aiming to create a life-long relationship and empathy with the audience (Platt, 2000).

Marketing theorists have been principally interested in the intersection between anthropomorphism and consumer behaviour and have approached the phenomenon from a psychological cognitive-based perspective. In an innovative study Hirschman (1994) suggests that consumers' need for possessing companion animals originates from the universal human tendency to attribute anthropomorphic characteristics to other living creatures. The study focuses primarily on the employment of a phenomenological research framework and the socialization processes between consumers and animals, overshadowing the importance of neotenic characteristics on consumers' perceptions. Drawing upon a content analysis of a large collection of advertisements using animal images, Spears, Mowen and Chakraborty (1996) conclude that the presentation of animals in anthropomorphic state is usually adopted by advertisers only with certain product categories. The research findings suggest that a taxonomic association of dogs as symbols of companionship, or horses - representing virility and masculinity - can be applied to particular durable and nondurable products and to a degree corroborates and substantiates advertisers' selective and conscious preference to use specific animals in marketing campaigns. Although Spears, Mowen and Chakraborty (1996) adopt an all-encompassing and generic theoretical framework such as the 'symbolic communication model' to interpret the interrelationships and production of cultural meaning between animals, individuals and the material world, it can be argued that the commercial use and representation of animals in non-Western contexts could stimulate different reactions to participants, thereupon variation in research outcomes. Aaker (1997) highlights that personification and anthropomorphism have

been successfully deployed by marketers aiming to imbue and promote brands with human personality traits. Similarly, Fournier (1998) refers to the human activity of anthropomorphizing inanimate objects as the main driving force behind the development of a 'partnership' between the consumer and a brand. In both studies, the phenomenon of personifying material objects is approached and discussed with sporadic references since for the authors the notion of anthropomorphism constitutes primarily a vehicle in investigating the relationships between consumers' experiences and brands. Following the experimental framework of Kiesler and Kiesler (2004), consumers seek to strengthen and extend their self-concept via immersing themselves into anthropomorphic processes related to their possessions. Without explicit references to the theory of anthropomorphism and highlighting the means whereby advertisers can manipulate consumers, McQuarrie & Phillips (2005) centre their attention on indirect metaphorical claims which embody and communicate humanlike traits and have been successfully used in magazine advertisements.

Aggarwal and McGill (2007) offer perhaps one of the most complete and empirically verified studies on the tendency to anthropomorphize objects examining how marketers encourage consumers to humanize a product by using schemas which resemble human-like features and form. They conclude that consumer preference of a product oscillates between the qualities of the item and anthropomorphic-related schemas. Delbaere et al (2011) interpret advertisements and relate the concepts of anthropomorphism and visual personification as means that prompt consumers' liking for a personified brand, substantiating and confirming, rather than enhancing or developing previous research findings. The majority of the aforementioned studies seek to evaluate or measure consumer reaction to a product or image that embodies humanlike traits thus

implying a psychologically-inspired account of human action. Recently, Brown (2010:221) sought to expand the disciplinary space in the field by elaborating on the representation and marketing applications of anthropomorphized animals in films, advertising, magazines, sports, literature and organizations amongst others. Drawing an analogy between contemporary and past humanlike descriptions of financial giants he remarked that in terms of anthropomorphism “the more things change in western capitalism, the more things stay the same.”

The study of anthropomorphism and marketing-related phenomena has centered on the interrelationships between the consumer and the perception of anthropomorphized brands. Via the employment of historical lens we seek to shed some light on the evolution of anthropomorphized brands, so as not only to broaden our theoretical and practical horizons (Brown et al, 2001; Tadajewski & Saren, 2008) but also to consider how the past and the present gestate embryonic future possibilities. We therefore examine and discuss how previous work on anthropomorphic marketing can inform and update our understanding of how humanlike characteristics can stimulate individuals’ imagination and motivate their thoughts, preferences and buying decisions.

### **Boris Artzybasheff**

Boris Artzybasheff was born in 1899 in Ukraine and was the only son of the well-known Russian writer and playwright Mikhail Artsybashev, whose novels while often prohibited for being scandalous were nevertheless widely translated. Boris grew up in Moscow and Petrograd surrounded by the intellectual circles and literary groups wherein his father used to play a

leading and protagonist role (Cooper, 1927). With the advent of the 1918 revolution, the teenager Boris Artzybasheff volunteered as sailor in a crew supplying the White Army with raw materials and during a planned trip to Sri Lanka he was informed that the destination changed to New York where the ship left him with 14 Turkish liras in his pocket and unable to speak English (Auer, 1960). Artzybasheff spent his 20th birthday on Ellis island. Securing permissions to stay in the United States was as difficult as securing a wage, so immediately after his arrival he boarded as a sailor to an oil-tanker to Latin America for a year, an experience that widened both his savings and English vocabulary (Cooper, 1927). As young artist in New York City, he was employed as engraver and producer of fashioning labels for medicine and beer bottles, and during this time his reputation as a talented creative designer began to grow (Iacono, 1993). In 1940 he embarked upon a long-standing professional relationship with *Time* Magazine after illustrating books and producing a successful magazine cover for *Fortune*. From 1940 until his death in 1965, he portrayed more than 200 imaginative covers for *Time*. These included anthropomorphic illustrations of countries and emerging technologies (for example anthropomorphized satellites and spacecraft on the moon) to portraits of leading individuals in the fields of politics, statesmanship and science such as Truman, Mao Tse-tung, Stalin, Hitler, Ho Chi Minh, Jacques-Yves Cousteau and Buckminster Fuller. Although best known for his work as cover illustrator for *Time*, *Fortune* and *Life*, Artzybasheff illustrated 50 books and wrote the outstanding collection of his work *As I See* (Artzybasheff, 1954/1998). He also acted as advisor to the Psychological Warfare Branch during WWII and since the early 1940s he devoted himself to advertising and commercial art. He produced ad work for Xerox, Shell Oil, Pan Am, Worlds Airlines, Parker Pens and Casco Power Tools amongst others. A specialist in anthropomorphic images, Artzybasheff was equally famous as an artist who illustrated human-



like machines and mechanized faces of humans and also as the man who depicted vivid and extreme ranges of human psychology and emotions such as anthropomorphic images of neuroses, feelings, conscious and subconscious desires. Taking into account his prolific and diverse *range* of work, we examine Artzybasheff's anthropomorphic images that fall into the categories of advertisements and commercial art, war propaganda and promotion of technological progress. Simultaneously, and based on rather limited existing biographical and academic sources, we focus on Artzybasheff himself, by examining his life, intellectual background, politics and contemporaries together with the influence of artistic movements on his anthropomorphic illustrations in advertising and mass media.

### **Artzybasheff the artist**

Artzybasheff's career reflects and pulls together some artistic movements of the early twentieth century, the financial ascendancy of manufacturing companies that were looking to respond to the emerging consumer culture since the 1920s and the corporate side of the mass media industry. Tenaciously eschewing and rejecting work in advertising during the early 1920s, Artzybasheff sought to dedicate himself in artwork and he succeeded as a book illustrator who specialized in exquisite black and white lines and shades. His talent, imaginative use of surreal, grotesque and mythological figures together with careful composition brought him many prizes including the prestigious John Newbery Award from the American Library Association (Iacono, 1993). To a great extent Artzybasheff and many of his contemporaries emerged as artistic descendants of America's Golden Age of Illustration (1880-1920), a period when the publishing of books and magazines as forms of entertainment, education and advertising expanded in an exciting and dramatic way. Based on improvements in pictorial reproduction and prior to the

dominance of photography, manufacturers realized that Americans' growing demand for reading was turning magazines into vehicles for promoting their goods, thus they employed successful illustrators and commercial artists to compete in terms of fresh, original and innovative styles in advertising (Perlman, 1979). In the early 1930s we notice that a talented generation of creative American illustrators - including Norman Rockwell, Grandma Moses, Mead Schaeffer Saul Steinberg and Artzybasheff - imported ideas from dominant artistic movements of the time such as Italian Futurists, Pound's Vorticism, Cubism and mainly Dali's revolutionary surrealism (Williams, 2007). As Heller (2002), the noted art director and graphic design chronicler, indicates the influence of these movements suffused and imbued illustrations with satirical, surrealistic and witty characteristics, circuitously manifested in Artzybasheff's future advertising work. In the following decades, Artzybasheff's commitment to creative production within the industries of advertising and mass media led in separating his work and ideas away from Pound's liking for Fascism, Breton's fondness for quasi-Marxist revolutionary surrealism and to a limited extent Dali's pursuit for discovering and illustrating Freudian sub-conscious themes (Williams, 2007). Artzybasheff gave a talk at a conference at the Trade Book Clinic in New York City in 1940 and he highlighted the transformation of artwork into a profitable business activity by underlying and criticizing publishers' intentions when they review artistic illustrations:

"I resent...[the publisher's] literal-mindedness, his lack of imagination, his inability or lack of desire to conceive of any other way of evoking an emotion or expressing a thought...And as a result, his inability to educate his public to any other form of expression." (Artzybasheff, 1941:31).

In spite of such critical attitude towards the corporate publishing industry that continued to employ him, Artzybasheff was also quick to observe the commercialization of the avant-garde movements via advertising and profit-driven exhibitions in New York City and Paris. During the same talk, he stated that “Picasso paints ‘Still in Life with a Guitar’ and even before his paint has time to dry, the Sixth Avenue Shoe Stores begin to using ‘abstract art’ for the windows backgrounds” and that “...Surrealism becomes important in Paris, reaches our shores overnight through the Museum of Modern Art and...it reaches Sixth Avenue in no time and already has been noticed in book-jackets and in advertising.” (Artzybasheff in Williams, 2007:126). In general, we observe Artzybasheff’s attempts to adopt and preserve a neutral distance both from the nearly carnivalesque commercialization of the leading avant-garde movements and also from the prosaic and unimaginative corporate demands. Nevertheless, from 1945 onwards, he employed his unique and grotesque anthropomorphic style primarily for commercial and advertising work.

### **Anthropomorphic advertising and commercial art**

During the 1930s, the advertising industry was aiming to increase consumer spending based primarily on the introduction and popularization of new products and services such as automobiles, radios, household appliances, films and sport events (Link, 1932). Anthropomorphic ads offered to develop a sense of intimacy and emotional response to hesitant and technophobic consumers in order to generate interest in new commodities. For example, when Xerox sought to launch and promote automatic xerography Artzybasheff illustrated an energetic and thrilled anthropomorphic head with two large and enthusiastic eyes ejecting dozens photocopies from a smiling mouth. The impersonal world of engineering, buttons and data cards

morph into a hard-working supporter and ‘friend’ of human capacity for service-driven companies which seek to embrace technological competition. We notice that Artzybasheff conceived anthropomorphism as the vehicle of technical advertising for the transformation of harsh and unsympathetic machines into flexible forms of consumption and symbols of a post-war American economy. In 1952 Shell Oil produced and launched the alkaline motor oil ‘Shell X-100’, Artzybasheff drew the embodiment of acid with a green loathsome demon that emerges genie-like within the damaged machine. Anthropomorphic traits are employed to illustrate the detrimental ‘enemy’ of the engine who has to be destroyed via Shell’s new product. Similarly, in 1959 Ernest Dichter advised Exxon to introduce the classic “Put a Tiger in Your Tank” advertising campaign that sought to associate the strength and virility of the tiger mascot with the company’s fuel products. When Lyoming incorporated pioneering tough gears into a new series of tractors, Artzybasheff added eyes, mouth and two steel-made wrists to the machine to personify strength and durability. As Smith (1993) suggests in a post-war era of technologically advanced industrialism and consumer capitalism the human body became a fascinating subject matter for hard science, through cybernetics and self-regulating machine systems (Clynes & Kline, 1960), and subliminal advertising techniques (Packard, 1960). In a period of both technological and economic turmoil Artzybasheff’s ‘man-saving’ anthropomorphic illustration entices potential customers to disengage their emotions from traditional methods of labor and catch the technology wave.

Following Foertsch (2008), several charismatic artists, painters and illustrators channeled their energies and talent to the promotion and selling of specific products. Apart from Artzybasheff one of the country’s most famous painters, Norman Rockwell, produced an enormous amount of

advertising work from 1917 until 1976 with clients such as Coca Cola, General Motors, Twentieth Century Fox Pictures, Kellogg's Corn Flakes and Ford Company amongst many others. During the 1930s and 1940s, several renowned illustrators such as Albert Dorne and Robert Fawcett oscillated between artistic exhibitions, magazine illustrations and commercial work, without hiding their predilection for the financially rewarding outcomes of the advertising industry. Contrary to his contemporaries, one of the most striking and idiosyncratic characteristics in Artzybasheff's anthropomorphic work had been his ability to draw inspiration from bizarre and controversial themes.

Not only financially depressive events, such as the Great Crash which spread turbulence to Americans but even a radio drama version could trigger a rising national psychosis. In 1938 a radio adaptation of the novel *War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898) over the CBS radio network suggested to listeners that an invasion from Martians was taking place. Thereof, conspiracy theories about the existence of aliens and a surfeit of UFO reports had been common phenomena in the United States during the 1940s and the commencement of Space Age in the 1950s. When Casco introduced a heating pad in the 1950s, Artzybasheff portrayed a happy and pleasant family of human-like aliens using the product to warm their newborn baby. The "heating pad concession on Saturn" was launched simultaneously with Casco's pop out dashboard cigarette lighter and Artzybasheff's depiction of a human-like Martian lighting a cigarette in his car-spaceship. In a similar manner, the official commercial of Budweiser, lunched in 2001 Super Bowl, presents the excitement of anthropomorphic aliens with the "whazzup" catchphrase whilst discovering the drink during their first contact with planet Earth.

Additionally, Artzybasheff employed anthropomorphic elements to depict extreme human emotions, addictions and desires related to products or services. For Ajax and Aero's sanitary paper drinking cups he portrayed a pair of atrophic and scraggy hands holding an iron, obsolescent and germ-contaminated cup of water. The heading "I am always waiting...I am Disease...the shadow at every man's elbow" is followed by Disease's first person narrative of its catastrophic and deadly activity during the Dark ages and especially America at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Disease sincerely admits that has been defeated by individual paper drinking cups and concludes the confession by warning against those who neglect hygienic methods of drinking water. Since Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) rearticulated the importance of feelings and emotions for consumption actions, we notice that consumer researchers have carefully explored consumers' response to positive and negative-emotional appeals (Cotte & Ritchie, 2005; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Laros & Steenkamp, 2005). Additionally, Kim and McGill (2010) have recently concluded that anthropomorphizing skin cancer can both increase and decrease risk perceptions and accordingly consumers' motivation to espouse self protective actions, such as wearing sunscreen. In 1954 Parke and Davies, America's oldest and larger pharmaceutical company, employed Artzybasheff to raise its corporate profile and range of products for the alleviation of disturbing emotions. As Sherman (2006) has recently argued personification of drugs can contribute to therapy since the patient reacts and perceives the activity of medication as a helpful person or aspects of a person. Artzybasheff illustrated anger, fear, jealousy, anxiety and worry via five male and female anthropomorphic masks whose face expressed the respective emotions. Artzybasheff's macabre and somehow gruesome anthropomorphic images in commercial art sought to evoke to potential customers both feelings of intimateness and humorous optimism (human-like machines, aliens and islands) and also to

trigger fear and awareness (Disease and disturbing human emotions). Perhaps, behind Artzybasheff's grotesque experiments with anthropomorphic products, we can identify the influence from Dali's fascination with bizarre and unearthly representations of conscious and subconscious motivations. As Heller (2002) observes, although Artzybasheff's visual language was often pigeonholed or labeled as surreal or grotesque, he intensely reacted to this categorization arguing that his 'burlesque or grotesque' style was established before Salvador Dali's. Also, many of his magazine covers remind Disney's comically friendly, imaginary and formulaic type, nevertheless Artzybasheff as a graphic commentator in the national media managed to maintain the right balance between realism, fantasy and metaphorical representation (Heller, 2002). Perhaps, Artzybasheff's versatile and multi-faceted artistic outcome, along with his continuous reluctance to acknowledge major influences on his work renders a categorization of his work into potential thematic categories - either as ala-Dali surrealism or Disneyesque - problematic or biased. He was quick to realize that our urge to anthropomorphize springs not only from our need to acquaint ourselves with unfamiliar concepts and commodities but also to conceptualize a humanlike representation of anxiety. Indeed, this period was characterized by an emphasis on psychological and psychoanalytic analysis of the buyer. Such growing interrelationships between psychoanalysis and consumer behaviour remained unnoticed before Packard's (1960) scathing exploration and demystification of consumer motivational research and Freudian ideas used in advertising and marketing.

Even if nascent American marketing and advertising research was based on market surveys and laboratory investigations, European trained social-scientists adapted and applied psychoanalytic methods so as to unravel consumers' subconscious desires and feelings about commodities and

services (Savitt, 1980; Stern, 2004; Tadajewski, 2006; Samuel, 2010). In Artzybasheff's advertising work, we notice both illustrations of humanized Freudian conditions (Williams, 2007) and his eagerness to caricature psychoanalytical theory. Just like innovative technologies, emotions, new products and aliens, the growing and fashionable viewpoints about the existence of subconscious and suppressed feelings, fears and ideal selves magnetized his interest. According to Alexander (1954) when Artzybasheff was informed that a field day was organized for amateur psychoanalysts interested in his sexier animations and anthropomorphic emotions, he replied "I get irritated with those damn Freudians. They try to see something in everything." Despite his efforts to disengage his work from Freudian circles or in particular from Dali's depictions of psychoanalytic concepts through pictorial surrealism, Artzybasheff produced and communicated direct, clear-cut and humorous representations of psychoanalytic diagnostic conditions (Heller, 2002; Williams, 2007). One of Artzybasheff's (1954) most celebrated collections is *Neurotica*, a series of anthropomorphic illustrations that portray neuroses, addictions, extreme emotions and overall well-known Freudian diagnoses and psychoanalytic concepts. Interested in the spread and popularity of psychology and its terminology that penetrated everyday discourse, Artzybasheff personified and illustrated a world of subconscious anxiety and conflicts. The complex of inferiority is embodied by a naked, short, child face and anxious man whose shadow on the wall schematizes a tall, masculine and healthy naked human body. On the other hand, the exaggerated feeling of superiority was portrayed by a one-eyed round face with a big melancholic mouth and lack of ears signifying apathy and indifference for other people's views. Artzybasheff delved deeper in the abyss of human psyche and produced anthropomorphic illustrations of anxiety, frustration, indecision, schizophrenia and repressed hostility amongst others.



Apart from extreme emotions, he portrayed and highlighted the negative impact of addictions and neurological disorders such as alcoholism and tobacco addiction via grotesque anthropomorphic experiments. Acting as forerunner of anti-smoking advertising campaigns, which originally appeared in the mid-1960s (Bayer & Colgrove, 2002; Warner, 1977), he illustrated a desperate old man who feverishly and circularly runs head-chained around a gigantic cigarette set on the ground. Three big needles penetrating his stomach, chest and throat signify some harmful health effects of smoking cigarettes and below the image appears the sarcastic slogan “so pure, so mild and so relaxing.” Today we find lighters that cough after the flip of the lip and recently Cancer Patients Aids Association has launched the ‘cigarettes smoking people’ series of ads, visually reversing the effect of smoking with shouldering male and female hands to be slowly consumed by their cigarettes in relaxing and luxurious bedrooms and restaurants. The highly addictive nature of alcohol is personified by Artzybasheff via a huge female anthropomorphic bottle of whiskey which snuggles the infant like an alcoholic adult between her two breasts. Drawing upon and simultaneously caricaturing Freud’s ideas about boys’ attachment to their mothers, he attributes human characteristics to the compulsive and disastrous aspects of alcohol consumption. It becomes evident, that Artzybasheff - as advertiser - was totally aware and interested in the application of psychological and psychoanalytic theories to the understanding and manipulation of consumers’ hidden aspirations and motivations but at the same time - as commercial artist - he used anthropomorphism so as to inform, entertain and familiarize consumers with their own anxieties, insecurities and subconscious desires and fears. As Brown (2010) and Guthrie (1995) have already indicated fear towards the unknown and the need for survival enhance and activate the anthropomorphic inclination of humanity. The arrival

of the Second World War epitomized and intensified the presence of these instincts and emotions.

### **War propaganda and political marketing**

As Nelson (1991) has underlined, during the outbreak of the war and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor the country was gearing up its war machine efforts to encourage and communicate to consumers an ethos of frugality, saving and economizing via national government campaigns and advertising posters. Most of the World War II posters and advertisements aimed to support a positive imagery that boosted individuals' confidence and glorified their own war efforts, with themes which could vary from encouragement of military recruitment, illustrations of Nazi and Japanese brutality, to indications on consumer saving and reasonable use of valuable resources such as food, water, electricity and tangible goods (Witkowski 2003). During the outbreak of WWII Norman Rockwell volunteered to offer his artistic services free of charge to the United States Office of War Information (OWI), however his offer was rejected by the Director of pictorial propaganda with the message: 'The last War you illustrators did the posters. This war we're going to use fine arts men, real artists' (Rockwell, 1988). Inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's speech in 1941, Rockwell illustrated and published two years later in *The Saturday Evening Post* the Four Freedom<sup>2</sup> Series. Despite the original rejection and after Rockwell's Series won public support and approval, the US Government enthusiastically adopted and utilized his work by printing 2.5 million copies and turning it into the centerpiece of a massive War bond campaign. Rockwell's ability to synthesize themes such as nostalgia, utopian scenes from everyday

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<sup>2</sup> Roosevelt's inspirational speech focused on four essential principles for universal human rights; which are the Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want and Freedom from Fear.

American life and a sense of innocence and simplicity, undoubtedly rendered him as America's most loved illustrator before, during and after WWII (Heller and Chwast, 2008). Artzybasheff's commercial and particularly propagandistic illustrations in wartime retained and underlined the expressionistic and satirical elements of his anthropomorphic style. For the Wickwire Steel Company he illustrated an anthropomorphic character made of wire and springs squeezing the nose of a cartoon depiction of Adolf Hitler, whose arms and legs schematize a swastika. Along with heightening the morale-unity of American consumers with the illustration of reliable, robust and exuberant human-like tanks, Artzybasheff attempted to caricature enemy's armored troops by turning them into comical and ineffective humanized machines. For *Life* magazine, he portrayed Hitler's panzer divisions as heavy and sluggish human agents with depressive faces and high-stepping legs. Similarly, the prominent 18-inch guns and 70000 ton displacement (Iacono, 1993) Japanese battleship was pictured and represented as a less than frightening threat. A shark-like prow of the battleship with a bone in its teeth, an anthropomorphic front gun tower with twiddling thumbs and a huge standing iron figure that holds an antenna, easily recognized by American readers as Emperor Hirohito, synthesizes a humorous propagandistic depiction of the enemy in media. These comic and satirical illustrations of the enemy had such emotional impact and success that they prompted several units of the American Army and Navy to ask Artzybasheff to design clear and emblematic military insignias (Heller, 2002).

Adopting a far more realistic style, Artzybasheff portrayed Hitler's face with an off-centered X scratched on it immediately after Hitler's suicide in 1945 for the cover of *Time* magazine (Foertsch, 2008). Being capable of adapting to different styles and work tasks, he became advisor to US Department of State and Psychological Warfare Branch, institutions heavily

involved into the marketing of national policies and war propaganda. The war had been a period of active political involvement both for Artzybasheff and his wife, who was employed as recruitment chairman in the Manhattan Volunteer Office of Civilian Defense. Artzybasheff had been one of the founding members and signatories in establishing the 'Legion for American Unity' in 1941, as a 'non profit, non political organization of naturalized and first generation American citizens dedicated to the Cause of Freedom' (New York Times, 1941). The prime objective of the Legion was "to unite American citizens of foreign birth so as to support and encourage decisive action in defense of the United States and to insure the victory of the democracies over the totalitarian Axis" (New York Times, 1941). The Legion aimed to arouse awareness against the Axis propaganda that sought to divide and promote ethnic group hostility in the United States and it was formed by an intriguing amalgamation of several prominent first generation immigrants stemming from various professional fields such as the academia and sciences, public administration and the arts. Moreover and moving away from his anthropomorphic illustrations, he designed for the State Department a detailed military map of China's main roads and rivers, with emphasis on the areas under Japanese control and informational diagrams about the existing supply chain systems for oil, food and other natural resources. Acting as geographer for the U.S Army Training Command, Artzybasheff also produced a sophisticated atlas and visually useful diagrams for military operations in Europe.

Although nowadays the term propaganda carries a depreciatory tone as a form of unethical persuasion and manipulation of the masses, deeply stigmatized by Nazi's advanced techniques (O'Shaughnessy, 2009); in wartime it was widely accepted as an essential and advanced applied science directed towards the achievement of national and public goals. Directly involved in

psychological warfare and effective marketing policies, Artzybasheff embraced propagandistic aims but simultaneously, via his optimistic and humorous graphic style, sought to caricature and publicly expose the intentions behind these manipulative techniques, including the employment of propagandistic art for the spread of nationalistic viewpoints in the United States. In 1940 and before the outbreak of the WWII Artzybasheff (1941: 31) stated:

“I do resent the slick salesmanship of others who insist on talking about National Art. The higher a culture becomes, the easier it is to interchange it. So let us leave this end of the business entirely to that young and active firm of Goering & Goebbels, Incorporated.”

Contrary to Rockwell’s idealistic and sentimental illustrations of peaceful American life – whose oeuvre in many cases unwillingly conformed to the propagandistic aims, patriotic goals and political affiliations of his major employer Saturday Evening Post (Rockwell, 1988) - Artzybasheff’s war propaganda posters almost exclusively focused on the representation of the *enemy* rather than the efforts of the federal government and defense industries to promote war bonds, national pride, frugality and recruitment of women for factory labour. Being raised and educated in a middle-class intellectual environment in Russia, boarding as a sailor for a year and working in the multi-cultural artistic scenery of New York City, Artzybasheff’s background epitomized a cosmopolitan and exotic personality of an artist who imported in his illustrations European notions, the rich tradition of Byzantine art and an intercontinental taste from different cultures, regimes and artistic contexts (Heller, 2002). Such cosmopolitan artistic background finds the opportunity to emerge and speak out during a global war, acting as geographer who modeled the remote European and Asian war terrains and as an illustrator who

anthropomorphically depicted the ruthlessness, vileness and weaknesses of the enemy, quite often in an funny way.

Likewise with the amusing illustration of Freudian concepts, he personified and anthropomorphically illustrated radio propaganda, aiming to visually demystify its tactical and controlling character. Artzybasheff's portrayal of radio propaganda in 1941 shows a two-headed anthropomorphic monster holding loudspeakers and yelling false reports via fingertip microphones. Insulators protect its legs from the electric lines from where it draws power. Similarly to marketers promoting and consumers using brands to express their identities (Chernev et al, 2011; Aaker et al, 2004), marketers of national policies and propaganda promoted ideological and war symbols to heighten the morale of citizens and strengthen the belief in victory (Bernays, 1942; Casey, 2001). As Quinn (1994) suggests in an original and controversial study about the construction of the swastika as an icon and sign of national identity, the Nazis had long time ago recognized and attributed an anthropomorphic identity to the emblem. As expected, Artzybasheff did the same for *Life* magazine in 1942. Acknowledging the misuse of the ancient Indian man-made symbol, he illustrated a post-apocalyptic scenery where Hitler, medal-heavy Goring, Goebbels and Himmler appear as defeated and tortured swastika-like reptiles entrapped by their own cruelty and ruthlessness throughout a limitless nightmare. For the majority of American citizens, primarily those who experienced World War I, the idea of becoming embroiled in an expensive military conflict in the remote parts of Europe and Asia sounded like an extremely risky national plan. Artzybasheff's war posters intended to promote an anthropomorphic perception and caricature representation of enemy weaknesses and depravity so to demythologize and mitigate initial Nazi success.

The realm of propaganda was not restricted to psychological warfare and national policy. With the onset of the Cold War propaganda expanded to public diplomacy, the marketing of foreign policies and political campaigns (Cull, 2008). During this period politicized posters and magazine covers developed an industry and art in the communication of political ideas, which is now recognized as a growing research discipline known as political marketing (Henneberg & O'Shaughnessy, 2009; Newman, 2002; O'Shaughnessy 2002). From the end of WWII up to the late 1960s, Artzybasheff animated, humanized and personified images of countries, national symbols and brands. In 1947, after the partition of India, the country was illustrated in Time magazine as a self-hurting and desperate goddess Kali. An overpopulated red ship with a humanized dragon on the bow and a monstrous anthropomorphic hammer and sickle also depict Artzybasheff's understanding of Communist and totalitarian regimes in Time and Fortune magazines. In the years of the Cold War the colorful and lush covers and advertisements of Time and Fortune, which had been required readings both for middle classes and in Wall Street (Kobler, 1968), turned out to be the main marketing tools for political parties and candidates, and government propaganda. When Artzybasheff was first employed by Time magazine in 1941, he commenced a dispute with the editors on their traditional views about straightforward cover portraits (Heller 2002). Artzybasheff proposed, and eventually succeeded in gaining agreement to illustrate 'expressive backgrounds' or metaphorical and allegoric artistic platforms which offered the opportunity to infuse and inject some of his personal viewpoints on an otherwise unbiased portrait. These backdrops had been quite effective when he was portraying 'villains' or 'enemies' such as Hitler and primarily Stalin who used to appear very often in the work of illustrators during the Cold War. As member of the Legion for American Unity, Artzybasheff

had been a committed supporter of President Roosevelt during the war and overall his political beliefs were affiliated with democratic and liberal values and a strong dislike towards racism and extremes ideological camps. Elsewhere, Artzybasheff (1954/2008) has noted that his work and ideas oppose “any form of tyranny and control of thought including communism, fascism, jingoism and spread-eaglesism.”

Industrial prosperity, technological advance and mass demand for products characterized the industrialized, aspiring and consumer-oriented American society in the 1950s (Collins, 2000). Spending rose again after the war period and the consumer boom introduced a series of new products to markets, whilst new forms of media introduced a communicative field wherein individuals were exposed to consumable images, products and opinions (Abrams, 2000). Friendly human-like computers, airplanes, telephonic devices, automated teller machines, televisions and radios amongst others were drawn by Artzybasheff for the cover of Time Magazine in the mid-1950s enticing potential customers to consider the surfeit of commodities for their household and leisure activities. Aside from American’s conspicuous confidence with the emerging consumer culture, scientific advancement and endeavors augured continuous progress from domestic devices to supremacy in outer space exploration. In 1960 the undeclared technological and ideological space race between USA and USSR was clearly depicted in Artzybasheff’s humanized and reliable space rockets, satellites and machines.



### **Promotion and critique of technological progress**

The fear of a post-war economic depression, anti-deal business interests and the importance of mass consumption encouraged the promotion of prosperity and increased consumer spending (Galbraith, 1957/1987; Scitovsky, 1976). The expansion of credit cards, properties, job mobility and accessible status symbols for an emerging middle class (Duesenberry, 1949) produced faith in the post-war economy. Marketing and consumer behaviour theorists also became fascinated with consumer's personality, ethnicity, image, skin-colour and overall segmentation variables related to individual's body and lifestyle (Kahl, 1957; Martineau, 1958; McCann, 1957; Warner et al. 1949). Advertisers manipulated signs and symbols so as to unravel consumer desire and insecurities with the body, social status and image in general (Packard, 1960). During the same period, a large part of Artzybasheff's commercial and artistic anthropomorphic work offered a visual register of the postwar intersection between developing machine technologies and the forthcoming flexible forms of American consumption.

In 1951 issue of *Life* Artzybasheff humorously illustrated the adaptations of human body and economic behaviour to an age of technological miracles and highly refined consumption patterns. Titled as 'Improved Design for Modern Man', it portrays an Adam and Eve couple of cyborgs, each incorporating computerized and automatic parts and devices that facilitate their participation in a mechanical age of affluence and consumer choice. Artzybasheff uses arrows so as to include witty interpretations for each of the post-humanized advances of modern high-tech consumers. For a hook protruding out of man's chest, Artzybasheff clarifies its use as "Handy-grip grapple hook for holding on to bar, subway strap or office desk." The Improved Man also

contains a built-in filling cabinet, a detachable heart, a kind of early iPhone, a birdcage and attached luxurious champagne glasses. The pink anthropomorphous woman possesses an extra arm which is “boneless; therefore absolutely flexible, for zipping dresses in the back, also holding cigarettes, gesticulating and signaling turns while driving.” Also she has a rear view mirror, wireless radio, a tray of martinis and a conspicuous shawl. Illustrated as the precise opposite - mechanically and mentally - from the man, she has a ‘manhole’ in the head “for easy access to brain compartment by psychoanalyst.” Americans’ need to adapt to a working environment of mechanized plasticity along with sophisticated consumption lifestyles is exemplified in Artzybasheff’s anthropomorphic machine/bodies. As it was mentioned above, the industrial mechanization of American life was reflected into the interplay between consumption and cyborg culture, the intersection of human mind and intelligent machines (Gonzalez in Grey et al, 1995; Haraway, 1991; Simon, 1969). The structuring and embodiment of technology into the material and emotional life of the consumer is illustrated in Artzybasheff’s anthropomorphic design. Similarly, marketing theorists and consumer researchers (Giesler, 2004; Venkatesh et al, 2002) have discussed the emergence of the contemporary post-human consumer whose identity has been dramatically altered by technological products, networks and cultural meanings. Artzybasheff’s ‘Improved Design for Modern Man’ blurred the borders of what constitutes and represents an anthropomorphic living entity and what is a commodity, in the same way that nowadays virtual environments, wired spaces together with prosthetic gadgets prompt us to reconsider the consumer-object relation and its complicated interactions (Campbell et al, 2010). The notion of agency and personification related to objects and possessions has been discussed in the area of consumer research and branding (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006) primarily in terms of how human entities interact, talk and form relationships

with brands/products, and vice versa. For Artzybasheff, the anthropomorphic marriage between these elements produces a personality, character or face that deserves both to be examined and caricatured.

Despite his enthusiastic statements and humanized illustrations about the machine as a valuable and invigorating prosthetic device to human body, his artistic and commercial work subtly reflects his skepticism and ambivalence towards the exploitative mechanization of human behaviour - economic and social - and culture. In his book Artzybasheff (1954) is straightforward about his relationship with machines:

“I am thrilled by machinery’s force, precision and willingness to work at any task, no matter how arduous or monotonous it may be. I like machines. I would rather watch a thousand-ton dredge dig a canal than see it done by a thousand spent slaves lashed in submission.”

In his most famous collection of anthropomorphized machines, we observe amazing human-like and hard-working weaving fences, calculators, tractors, electric welders, automatic vertical mills and hydraulic presses amongst other engines which are producing more machines and industrial goods. On the one hand, these automatic agents seem like strenuous, energetic and alive machines but they also appear as people become the devices that constantly supply and meet the demands of a growing consumer society. Enigmatic face expressions vacillate between liberation and dejection, exploitation and liveliness mirroring Artzybasheff’s endorsement and critique of a machine age where the human body encapsulates the technological influence of productive powers and also the plasticity and somatic flexibility of consumption practices. Crossing the

boundaries between the machines and humans, Artzybasheff offered such original and intriguing images of humanoid technology which prompted the Managing Editor of *Time* to argue about Artzybasheff that “He held his own true mirror up to the twentieth century. In depicting the machine he had no peer. He humanized it, showed it as a monster, and laughed at it.” (Heller, 2002: 160). An exemplar of the anthropomorphic illustration of the corporate mechanization of management can be found in Artzybasheff’s ‘Executive of the Future’ published in *Esquire* magazine in 1952. The bionic executive has a computerized brain, four automatic arms and his hi-tech modern body is connected with a surfeit of buttons transmitting his thoughts and decisions to a wider set of networks. His melancholic eyes and woebegone turning lips raise ambivalence whether the powerful executive represents a Fordist senior manager or an ordinary and unhappy middle-class American entrapped into a futuristic and computerized machine body. Do we observe the promising penetration and incorporation of a sublime computer era into human life or the gradual transformation and submission of everyday experiences and actions to constant rationalization, economic efficiency together with mass production and search for quality? For the American working and middle classes, Fordist constituted an intensive transformational system of accumulation and organization of labour that consequently revolutionized the conditions of mass consumption and contributed to the emergence of consumer culture (Lee, 1993; Slater, 1997). The ‘Executive of the Future’ and ‘Improved Design for Modern Man’ personify the building of new American white and blue collar class identities whose involvement in a mass production plan of efficient management promised or ensured participation in diverse and distinguished market segments of increased purchasing power. Artzybasheff’s mechanized face of consumers or humanized face of machines wasn’t limited to

indicate the interaction between the alive and nonalive but also to highlight the comic and dramatic aspects of the symbiosis between the humans, machines and commodities.

In general and although his work included and synthesized a whole range of metaphorical, allusive, grotesque, satirical and macabre anthropomorphic experiments, Artzybasheff accomplished to maintain a balance between obfuscated and comprehensible interpretations of reality, conveying visually provoking and intriguing messages via advertising and magazine covers. As Heller (2002:161) argues, in a period when Rockwell's 'clearly banal realistic sentimentality' touched Americans' hearts and minds and created hordes of imitators in mass media and commercial art, Artzybasheff focused and championed the conceptual illustrations of anthropomorphic design. He managed to develop the skill to seduce and captivate audience's attention and concentration via a puzzle of details schematizing and formulating the humanized intentions behind products, weapons, governments, institutions and machines amongst others. Aiming to synopsise his work a writer in *Life* Magazine said that "The measure of his ability to put his point across in paint is that the more closely the paintings are examined, the more clever their details become." Although his work can be approached by a plethora of artistic, academic and intellectual angles and perspectives, a low-profile and moderate illustrator such as Artzybasheff humorously demythologized his unique style and admitted that "being slightly myopic, all I have to do is take off my glasses and the world looks that way."

## **Concluding comments**

Photocopiers, demons, aliens, diseases, psychoanalytic concepts, countries, weapons and machines are only some of the products, conditions or ideas which Artzybasheff anthropomorphically illustrated and employed as a form of art, advertising or propaganda. Examining Artzybasheff's artistic and professional background, the main influences behind his work and how he stood compared to his contemporaries, this paper sought to build a portrait of an illustrator who championed the area of anthropomorphic marketing for many decades throughout the twentieth century. Artzybasheff's humanized products and ideas mirror and reflect how he witnessed, experienced and portrayed the passage from the Prohibition Era, to the Great Depression, Roosevelt's New Deal and the threat of WWII. After 1945 Artzybasheff synthesized satirical and surrealistic characteristics, depicting and simultaneously caricaturing the arrival of a highly industrial, individualistic and materialistic society, illustrating America's enthusiasm and obsession with new consumerism, technological progress and Cold War propaganda. Although in a contemporary visual art world of photographic magazine covers and digitalized advertising messages, where the illustrator's anthropomorphic images have been overshadowed by the creative outcome of graphic designers and animators, we can argue that Artzybasheff stands out as a progenitor of contemporary anthropomorphic branding and marketing. Artzybasheff's commercial art and advertising work highlights the underlying cultural work of marketing, branding and advertising to bring otherwise distant, alien and faceless products, technologies and ideas into a communicable realm for human action, behavior, imagination and buying. It can therefore legitimately be considered as an important mechanism through which market economy and industrial modernity becomes consumer culture.

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