

Samsung GALAXY S III.

Armitage argues, “What is ‘natural’ has a dual, even contradictory, role in advertising. Nature is given meaning through culture, but its significance lies in the fact that nature is understood to be outside or even the very opposite of culture” (cited in Hansen, 2010: 136). Taking into consideration two ads from Samsung, introducing the new Samsung GALAXY S III, it is possible to see how differently and cleverly nature is brought into the picture in order not only to sell a product, but also to create a kind of deviated ideological environmental position in the viewers’ minds.

Raymond Williams (1983) stated that probably the word ‘nature’ is the most complex that we have in our language (ibid: 156); in fact, it is just by looking deeper into how discourses of nature are presented into these two commercials that it is possible to understand the way certain products are promoted, and themselves promote specific environmental beliefs that are socially/culturally constructed. In order to not get confused, I will refer to them as ad one and ad two in the same order as they are posted on the web page.

Ad number one, under an ideological point of view adopts a completely anthropocentric approach, where nature remains in the background. The concept of ‘nature as a backdrop’ is a technique extremely used by advertisers in order to sell with the product also the environment and life style that is supposed to surround it (Corbett, 2006:150). During this one minute ad, every clip shows human interaction with the phone, and then it is followed by a phrase, or in a certain way a personification of the object, that explains in how many ways the Samsung Galaxy S III will be useful in everyday life. The discourse that Samsung is using, is the one of Pseudo Satisfaction, by appealing emotionally to the viewer and promising a 100% technological efficiency,

which is then reiterated at the end of the ad when for the first time there is a voice over saying: “*Galaxy S III, designed for humans*”. Even though the ad in itself seems to be very simple or harmless, there are a lot of things apart from how great it is to own one of those phones that are not even mentioned in it. These omissions are part of what Hansen calls “frames”; they regulate what is selected, emphasized or excluded in the ad making it all appear natural. In this case it is important to highlight the way the whole ad is “framed”, in the sense of, whose interests are served and whose needs are promised to be satisfied (Hansen, 2010:31). First of all, while watching the ad there is nothing truly concrete about how does the product work or how it was created, or maybe how this one is different from the previous model; the nature is almost invisible, and when it is shown seems to be there for no purpose at all but as a secondary element.

However, in the second ad there is a quite important shift in the focus. The ideological position is still totally anthropocentric, and nature is still used as a background, but since the very beginning the product is almost embraced by it. Moreover, the first thing that viewers read as soon as the product is presented is the phrase at the bottom “design inspired by nature”. How can the squared plastic design of a cell phone be inspired by nature? And this question may find two answers; the first one is that it is simply indirectly restating that human mentality sees nature as a pleasure for human beings, or perhaps that the phrase is missing the word “human” before nature. The second one, is that it would have been more correct to state that the design is made up with natural elements that during the manufacturing process become very toxic in order to become some part of the phone, and consequently, once the life cycle of the phone ends, everything will be put under the category of E-waste. But such a statement would not sell the product. Corbett would define it as a form of propaganda, specifically because of three main reasons; it is repetitive, it is framed in a close

environment that does not give any concrete or additional information about the product and, also related to the first ad, its effectiveness and fast use are highly promoted without making any reference to its risks or ecological impact. Furthermore, leaving for a second the content of the ad, noteworthy is the division through which it is able to target men or fathers, then children, women or mothers, and finally to promote interaction within a familiar environment between people who own that same Samsung Galaxy S III.

In addition, a point that both ads stress a lot is a presumed technological evolution through which potential consumers can make the phone become part of people's daily life, family and self growth. They construct expectations in the viewer by appealing to our ideas of a hypothetical technological sublime, asserting that thanks to one unique device it is possible to satisfy our needs quickly and easily. Corbett in her book also talks about an "internal conversation" (2006:98), that in relation to the videos is identifiable in the phrases presented at the bottom of each clip; there is no voice over but the one of the person who is reading them. Almost like a self- persuasion throughout the establishment of a direct connection with the potential consumer, supported by images.

Regarding what concerns Samsung relation with sustainability and 'Green production', in the Greenpeace guide to greener electronic, it actually covers the 7th position (Greenpeace site). According to the survey the company is doing a very great job concerning its products life cycle "Samsung's Energy score increased due to progress on reporting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions information" (ibid). Its energy use compared to the global use is kept low at a 0.2% that will represent an excellent saving by 2015, which will correspond to a total of 30%. Yet, it fails in controlling and decreasing carbon intensity emissions, which from last year increased of the 9%.

Furthermore, the company is also using recycled plastic, for example in the manufacturing of phones and refrigerators; the objective was +2.62% by 2013 (ibid).

The Greenpeace company declared that everyday a growing amount of people all over the world rely on “phones and tablets to make their lives more productive and fun... but the rate at which [people] purchase and discard these devices is having a serious impact on our planet”. In fact, as claimed in the video “The Story of Electronics” (2010), E-waste is exponentially growing and becoming a worrying issue if analyzed on a global scale, because the business and market in which and by which products are fabricated is developing very fast. Taking plastic as an example, it is sufficient to think about in how many ways we get in touch with this material every day; we drink from it, we cook from it, eat, type, drive, touch, sit, etc... yet it constitutes an endless source of pollution for the planet (Stibbe, 2009:139). A probable answer to E-waste is proposed by Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller, in the book *Greening the Media*. The solution might be the downgrading of microeconomic models in order to highlight their incapability to answer the question of the eco-crisis. Still, in order for this to happen is needed a radical behavioral change in both buyers and sellers that transfer their point of view from anthropocentric to eco-centric. However, to have a truly, or at least closer eco-centric point of view shift, humans’ mentality must stop thinking the relationship between men and nature as a vertical relation where human is at the top. Nonetheless, Samsung engaged it self with the “Planet First” approach, this means that any kind of product coming from their industries, before it enters our houses, is made sure to have a positive imprint on the environment and supports eco-friendly designs for our planet. Moreover, it took the initiative to analyze its products’ components with the aim of identify which materials (for example tantalum, coltan, or gold) could contain conflict materials, not only to protect the environment from more chemicals, but also for health prevention of

its workers/smelters. Looking at the picture from this position, may suggest that Samsung is adopting what Stibbe calls the “Imaginative response”, that is the process of rethinking the relationship that exist between human beings and the environment in order to adjust society’s characteristics (140).

Going back to the videos of the Galaxy S III, what bounce to the eye is the constant proposal of the phone as the allegory of happiness, almost like the last step to satisfy, even if on a small scale, all Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Starting from the very basic Biological needs such as sleeping, because the phone is built with a smart screen technology that is able to see whether your eyes are opened or closed to self fade to black, and let you rest. Then also helps the owner of the phone to create new relationships with those who also own one and therefore share the same experiences of joy and self-respect.

Moving on, while watching the videos, presumably for the first time as an usual consumer, there won’t be much time to deeply analyze the market strategies behind the ads, so the main thing that really remains in the viewer’s eyes and mind is the predominance of one color: green. Taking as an example the video “The Natural Effect” about false advertising, it can be assessed that with the same easiness with which in the video the word “natural” is used to mislead people impressions; in the same way Samsung ads use the image of nature to redirect its viewers from an actual ideological position (anthropocentric) to the expected one (Samsung Galaxy S III is natural and eco-centric/ friendly).

In conclusion, it is not enough to analyze both ads without a proper content analysis. Indeed Samsung is adopting a more eco-friendly approach and care towards the environment, but we should not forget that what we are talking about is not just the product; it is the promotion of it with the only aim to make profit. The subtle, yet

inevitable commodification of nature and life style is the guideline that both ads follow. The sequence of scenes that make the ads, in the end are selling an ideal; the fact that nature, happiness, family satisfaction, and self pleasure can be both and sold with that specific cell phone. Nature in it self is a symbol charged with values, which are not ethical or moral, they are simply monetary. Both ads are making claims, claims about the Galaxy S III and the impact it will have in everyday life, which obviously is positive. Hence, can consumerism be or promote eco-centric values? Maybe yes, but, at least according to my opinion, is the consumer himself and the way he or she uses the product that really matters. This because the idea of a fully and real green ad or product is an oxymoron in itself; recalling Corbett words: “The only Green product is the one that is not produced” (157).