Text Link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnVuqfXohxc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnVuqfXohxc)

**Friends Furever, Fearing the Man: Android Makes an Appeal to an Older, More Affluent Audience Through Technophobic and Anti-Establishment Sentiments.**

When I first watched the ‘Friends Furever’ ad from Google’s Android, I have to admit I was instantly charmed by the catchy folksy music and the playful images of animals playing together. I wasn’t sure what the ad was about until the very end, and perhaps it was the disarming content, or perhaps it was the incongruity of a fundamentally high-technology brand advertising with a lack of any sort of technology in the images shown that left me with the suspicion that more was happening in this video than was at first obvious. In accord with Len Masterman and his commentary on ‘Screen theory’, I chose to dig deeper in an attempt to “reveal the constructed nature of [this] media text,” and show how this particular “media representation reinforced the ideologies of dominant groups within society” (Buckingham, 2003). While I was definitely entertained by the piece, I did my best to “put aside [my] subjective responses and pleasures” and engaged in analysis to expose the ‘hidden’ ideologies in the video (Buckingham, 2003). Sure the commercial is fun and feels good, but what exactly is it saying to us?

On the surface, the ad appears to be taking a celebratory stance on diversity, and extending that to the technology product being sold, by first pairing different animal ‘buddies’ in the state of loving play together, and then comparing this symbolically to the multitude of android-capable products on the market. Looking closer, however, I perceive a deeper, subtle and more insidious anti-establishment message throughout the video, as well as an appeal to the inherent protectionist mistrust of technology that the target market possesses. These messages are undoubtedly a part of an attempt to appeal to an older, less technically capable (or more technically fearful) audience. On one end, the ad makes an appeal to the technophobic older American that may not yet be part of the smart phone market, but might be feeling left out of what ‘the kids’ are doing. On the other end, Google is sending a message that Android is the choice of diversity and difference, meant to appeal to the older, perhaps more affluent demographic of the typical Apple user, who may yet harbor a sense of guilt around their own socio-economic status, or remember their youth in the 1960’s and 1970’s when they might have been an active part of other anti-establishment movements. There is most definitely a class distinction that’s being created in the ad, and Android is attempting to capitalize on the impulse of its target demographic to distance itself from displays of wealth and technological sophistication through the use of ‘older media’ such as the 1970’s soundtrack and the mundane everyday environments to evoke and import ideas, issues and feelings from those older references (Buckingham, 2003).

How do I justify this stance from a video hardly more than a minute long, depicting frolicking animals and never making any specific claims about technology at all? In this case, I think what is left unsaid and merely suggested is more powerful than what is made explicit. First, the absence of anything technologically more advanced than a washing machine in the entire ad, and the poor and grainy quality of the filming in many cases, suggesting older video equipment, allows the ad to speak to an audience that is disinclined to pay attention to the slicker, more modern styles of advertising typically used for marketing technological devices. This video has, rather, been intentionally stripped of technology, and could be a video from the 1970’s or 1980’s, calling on the remembered experience of media from decades ago. For those that hold a protectionist stance against mobile and internet technology, this ad flies under the radar, and helps to disarm any moral defensiveness that might be present about the media promoting consumerism or materialism (Buckingham, 2003). The ad simultaneously could be a collection of engagements with participatory culture, small YouTube videos captured and posted by everyday people, on their mobile devices – the ad skillfully blurs the line between technophobes and digital natives, allowing for a nexus point for the two populations to meet and ‘be together’.

Indeed, what is being sold by this ad is not technology, but instead a concept of diversity and community with its single tagline “be together. not the same.” With a lack of upper case letters to reduce the amount of textual pretention to a minimum, Google is implying it is different from another class of individuals that take pretention seriously through an ostentatious display of wealth and technical acumen (i.e. the stereotypical image of the Apple user).

The video opens innocently with the gentle arpeggiated chords of Roger Miller’s 1973 country folk song “The Ballad of Robin Hood and Little John”, calling up reminiscence from those old enough to remember the song and the associated Disney animated feature. Hearing this, and seeing the opening frames of an orangutan and a hound dog in a friendly arm-on-shoulder embrace, I’m already asking myself – if these animals are the representative replacements for the anthropomorphized animal characters of Robin Hood and Little John, who is Prince John and the Sheriff of Nottingham? Throughout the video, there are images of playful animals enjoying each other’s company in unlikely pairings – ducklings and kittens, dogs and cats, rhinos and sheep, elephants and dogs, but what is glaringly missing is the dominant animal in the animal kingdom – man. Humans are explicitly missing from the content of this tale, but as the observer could easily be cast in the role of the establishment – I’m told that Robin Hood and Little John were “never ever thinkin’ there was danger in the water, never ever dreamin’ that a schemin’ sheriff and his posse was a watchin’ them and gatherin’ around…” – I’m left asking the question, “Am I part of that establishment posse, or do I get to be part of the merry men?”

The lyrics of this iconic song and the tune are evocative of a folk, lower or middle class sensibility. This is not polished symphonic music, or modern hip rock, but good ol’ country music, with dropped letters and apostrophes intact. There is no pretention in this song whatsoever, and it is probably intended to appeal to the average older middle class consumer, who is likely remembering a cartoon from his or her own childhood.

The scenes in this video are also indicative of a socio-economic status (SES) not in the upper class – the environment of the videos are either of outside in raw, untended nature, in what appear to be lower or middle-class backyard settings, overgrown and untended by hired gardeners, or indoor scenes of middle-class, slightly chaotic family homes, that might contain children but are quite definitely lived-in and authentic environments. In one scene, a dog pushes a cat in a stroller across an old mismatched red-and-white concrete-tiled patio, depressed in places, grass growing between the cracks, decorated with inexpensive lawn ornaments, and bordered with an old bamboo fence overgrown with vines. In another scene, we see a cockatoo feeding pasta to a dog from a pot on the stove, in a kitchen that is small and its counters covered in pots, pans, coffee mugs and inexpensive appliances. In yet another scene, we are shown a cat standing on a cat tree, opening a doorknob for a dog, in a hall attached to a laundry room, decorated with three skateboard decks hung on the wall as art. These last two scenes are obviously moments when animals are seen to be pulling one over on their human masters, while Miller’s song blithely tells us they had no clue they were being watched. The video requests identification with a SES that is more the 99% than the 1%, and suggests through association that Android is the phone for the masses, a place where the ethical ‘outlaws’ can congregate and play together without a care for those on the other side of the gilded fence.

And yet, I can’t help but feel that the ad is also making an appeal for a smaller sub-set of Apple users to jump ship and join the other side. If the average Apple iPhone users are 35 or older, it is more likely that they have a direct experience of the 1970’s, with the anti-establishment hippie movement, and they might have a desire to distance themselves from an air of elitism implied by their use of “The Man’s” device, within a monoculture of rounded corners and chrome finishes. For those that are considering changing teams, we are given the refrain of Robin Hood and Little John “contemplatin’ nothing but escape and finally makin’ it” – switch your device to Android, and you’re free.

In our last scene, before we cut away to the all-white scene emblazoned with the green lowercase ‘android’ (evocative of the austere white ads of Apple), we are given one final glimpse of our friends the orangutan and hound dog; the orangutan, still with his hand on the head of his buddy dog, pulls his hand back, puts it behind his head, and grins as he falls onto his back. We’re told ‘be together. not the same.’, a call for individuality and a break-away from monoculture, in an unpretentious font, and with a scene designed to make us laugh –“golly what a day”. This imagery invokes for me Apple’s age-old motto “Think Different” – an original call to be a maverick minority in the face of the IBM-PC establishment. Now, instead of being told to intellectually engage, I am told instead, just to ‘be different’, and ‘not the same’ – the same as each other, or the same as the man? The general tenor of the ad is steeped in anti-intellectual celebration, as our characters are consistently ‘contemplating nothing’ and somehow holding virtue in their folly, as they slip away, carefree, from the agents of the establishment. Is diversity being celebrated, or deviance? Or in a world that is increasingly “heterogeneous and multicultural”, is this message an invitation to an older crowd into the contemporary world?

It doesn’t quite matter, because a robot leans into frame from the right lower side, and flashes us the peace sign – let’s all just get along. No harm, no foul to those Apple users that want to stay that way, right? Only now, do I realize this ad is selling us a phone platform, and Google has already emotionally won me over to their side through identification with the content and mood of the media. Different is good; getting along is good; being the same is bad. In a sense, Google is playing on the mechanisms of identity that Buckingham illustrates in “Introducing Identity” – I am told to identify, or be the same, as not being the same. A version of identity politics is being invoked here, where I am told to be in community with others not “in spite of difference, but because of it.” While difference is being celebrated, it is only by virtue of being different, and the individual qualities are lost through association.

danah boyd (2009) points out that we are “seeing people with similar levels of access engag[ing] in fundamentally different ways. And we’re seeing a social media landscape where participation “choice” leads to a digital reproduction of social divisions.” I wonder if, in a world where smart phones and devices are growing in popularity, and where for some a smart phone is the primary means for access to the internet, whether we can choose to identify with a specific SES by what platform we chose to purchase, remembering that for many, the price point of participation determines the choice for them. Google is selling participation for those who can’t afford an iPhone, and identity liberation for those who can.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect; in this presented world of outlaws and establishment, what is being stolen? Google would like us to think that we are the outlaws, fighting against the tyranny of sameness, stealing our fun as we ignore the dominant paradigm in favor of our individual (but shared) worlds of self-expression. Perhaps, however, Google favors themselves as the outlaw, fighting against the established market leaders (Apple), and trying to steal market share and attention from the most valuable customers in the mobile platform space.

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