**Real World Listening 1**

[part 1]

Presenter: Welcome to Business and Culture. Today we are talking about the role of advertising in society. Whether it comes from the commercial sector selling its products, or the public sector making government announcements, advertising has certainly been capturing people’s attention for a long time. To talk about what this means to society, with me in the studio today are Paul Smith, and advertising executive at Smith and Smith in London; Michael Bligh, lecturer in Communication Studies at the University of Garforth; and Marianne Bingley, author of “Communicating our Ideas through Advertising”. Paul, how do you think advertisements attract people’s attention?

Paul: There are many different ways of attracting people with advertisements and as long as advertisers have a simple message and deliver it clearly, there’s a good chance that they can attract somebody’s attention. The most important thing is to have ideas that excite and provoke people’s attention. If your idea is good enough, you will start capturing hearts and minds. Advertising might not be art, yet there is an art to capturing heart and minds.

Presenter: Michael, do you think that advertisements capture hearts and minds?

Michael: Well, I think that might be going a bit too far. I think one thing we can say is that advertisements have certainly become a big source of entertainment in our society. In a recent survey in the UK people said advertising had become as much a part of the environment as traffic and trees and that life without advertising would be dull. People regularly judge advertisements in Britain for how good or “clever” they are. The problem with all this, of course, is that it prevents people from talking about more meaningful things in their lives.

Bingley: Oh, I wouldn’t say that. For a start, we don’t always talk about meaningful things anyway. For example, when we talk about the weather, most of the people who do so are not farmers, they don’t work outdoors, the weather may not make any difference to their lives at all. But they still talk about it. It is a way of sharing an experience and that’s exactly the same when people talk about advertising. Advertising provides a common experience and we can share out ideas about it. I don’t even think it needs to capture hearts and minds. After all, can you say that the weather captures hearts and minds even though we talk about it everyday?

[part2]

Presenter: Yes that’s a good point. Just because it is a large part of our lives, it doesn’t mean that it is an important part of lives. Would you agree with that, Paul?

Smith: I think it is important because it reflects the deeper values of a society. Let me give you an interesting example. Recently a diamond company successfully carried out a marketing campaign to increase the sale of diamond rings in Asian countries. In order to do this, they have to change their marketing strategy. In western countries, diamonds have been linked with the idea of romance for decades. But the diamond company found that the same message was not very successful in Asian countries. When the company searched for values which had a stronger hold in the region they discovered that marriage has more symbolic power than romantic love. For this reason the diamond company concentrated on a campaign to promote diamond rings as ideal engagement rings. The diamond came to represent a promise of a shared future and family values rather than romantic love. The campaign was seen as a success in the region. The reason for this is that it identified a deeper value in the market it was aiming for.

Bligh: Yes, well we all know that advertising is good at finding out about the things that people hold dear. They have marketing surveys to do this of course, but they don’t necessarily tell us anything interesting or revealing about our values. At best they capture the most conservative values of society and rely on them to connect with the largest audience. All they do is to reinforce stereotypes.

Bingley: I’m not too sure if I agree with you there, Michael. Some advertisements are very progressive, especially if they are aiming for a younger audience. Advertisers specialize their campaigns according to their target markets. For example, successful young female professionals, or people who love adventure sports. Groups such as these are unlikely to hold very conservative views and so audiences are exposed to alternative views when they see the adverts. For example, there is a sportswear advertisement that promotes environmentalism by focusing on people’s desire to be in harmony with nature when they do sports. There is also a clothing advertisement that celebrates ethnic diversity and spontaneity in its poster campaigns. These are not really conservative values.

Presenter: Well, some very interesting points are being raised here, but now let’s see what our callers say, we have a caller from Birmingham on line 1…