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Publicity and Our Envious Society

In the words that follow I will seek to document the dynamic connection between the writings of John Berger (and his crew) in *Ways of* Seeing and the desirous art of Tom Wesselmann that appear in Flaminio Gualdoni's *Pop Art*. Both works focus on the aspirations of society in general, whether they be materialistic pleasures or financial success. It's those aspirations that drive people to the brink of uncontrollable consumerism. Desirable products that promise the fulfillment of luxurious dreams entice the public to fantasize about the better things in life, all while exhausting any chance they had at fulfilling those dreams.

From the dawn of the modern era, people have been subject to the recurrent idea of the perfect life - a quaint home with a freshly cut yard nestled on the end of an unoriginally-named cul-de-sac on the outskirts of a bustling city. Coined the "American Dream", this idea has been a common theme in advertising and publicity; take *Still Life* by Tom Wesselmann as an example. His painting displays well-known brands resting on a stereotypical-plaid kitchen table cloth, a central window framing the distant skyscrapers of a distant city, sophisticated contemporary art hanging on the wall, and crisp kitchen appliances accompanied by an old pot of morning's coffee and some refreshing beverages. This image of a perfect suburban kitchen directly ties in with the idea detailed in *Ways of Seeing* called publicity - how products in an image can produce an envious fantasy deep within the consumer. It's implied by the image that these well-known brands are consumed by affluent individuals that people wish to become. If these superior products are consumed, then their consumption conveys the image of a successful household, one that displays contemporary art and has all the up-to-date appliances (for the 1950's).

The same situation applies to the selected image from *Ways of Seeing*, which depicts grandiose works of art encased in extravagant frames complimented by antique furnishings and precisely trimmed shrubs. To an average person, just looking at the image generates fantasies of infinite wealth. "Money is life"; it allows us to pursue our lives anxious free and fulfill our most wildest dreams (Berger 143). Money creates rooms like the one shown in the book, an end goal to an otherwise middleclass person. The other picture illustrates not only the concept that buying a certain product will make you think and become more modern, but also the idea that phrases and words alter the way people look at an image. Two words, "Think Cool", in big letters above an image attach the connotation that purchasing this item creates a more intelligent, modern-thinking individual. Not only are the producers appealing to materialistic desires, but also to idealistic ones.

Both John Berger and Tom Wesselmann illustrate the want and need for more. More money, more products, more intelligence - everyone wants more. Society's envy of the rich drives consumerism and the never ending battle for a superior way of living. The day people are content with the way they are living is the day that images like the ones dissected today lose their edge on society.