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NOTES ON A NEW TYPE OF PROGRAM

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We spend more time with television than with work, play, or any single activity except sleep -- and TV has cut into that too. Recent figures show that since the introduction of video the Japanese people sleep an average of 1/2 hour a night less than before. But we have cornered the market for video daydreams. We have one TV set for every three Americans, 30 percent of all sets in the world, and we turn out enough dramatic shows to keep the world well supplied with video fantasy. What do they communicate?

Someone has called this vast outpouring of images of people and life the "consciousness industry." Its products are discharged into the mainstream of common consciousness. They become part of the symbolic climate which is to our minds what air is to our lungs. We are just beginning to develop an ecology of that cultural environment. It needs the participation of viewers just as the consumer and physical ecology movements need the participation of all citizens.

Many have asked what these dramatic images of our national ritual of TV viewing do to us. An equally important question is what we do with them. For the first time, this most powerful medium in history turns its cameras around to ask viewers these questions, and to illuminate the answers with the findings of studies and research in mass communications.

This new program will focus on some of the most popular dramatic shows on the air. Viewers will call the shots. They will be asked what they think of the shows, how they understand them, how they use the insights they might derive from their entertainment. Then we shall discuss their comments and questions in light of what they reveal about us and our society as well as the shows, and against the background of what we know about the nature and effects of television.

A popular dramatic show is selected for discussion and dissection each week. Viewers pose the questions. A communications researcher and student of television defines the issues and illustrates the points with selected excerpts, other visual materials, or live dramatization. The demonstrations become the springboards for the discussion of such problems as: Whom does TV violence hurt? What's wrong with pornography? Why all the happy endings? Does entertainment only entertain? "Crime does not pay" -- is that why it's wrong? Is fun bigotry fun or bigotry? How we live in the world of TV drama. Who cares "Who done it? and why. What do TV doctors and nurses really do? Why do video teachers fail? What's the place of women on TV? Black and white or color television. Etc.

Format: (1) Prior announcement. Ask viewers to tune in, send questions, etc. (2) Live studio audience of 15-20. Pre-screen initial question(s). MC and GG jointly open. First question leads to showing of first taped excerpt. MC moderates, introduces mail questions, calls for questions from audience, enters discussion to sharpen up issue when needed, etc. (3) Sign off by asking viewers to send in more questions, to suggest other programs to be discussed. Announce next program.