



their eyes flicking between a battery of TV screens and their interviewer.

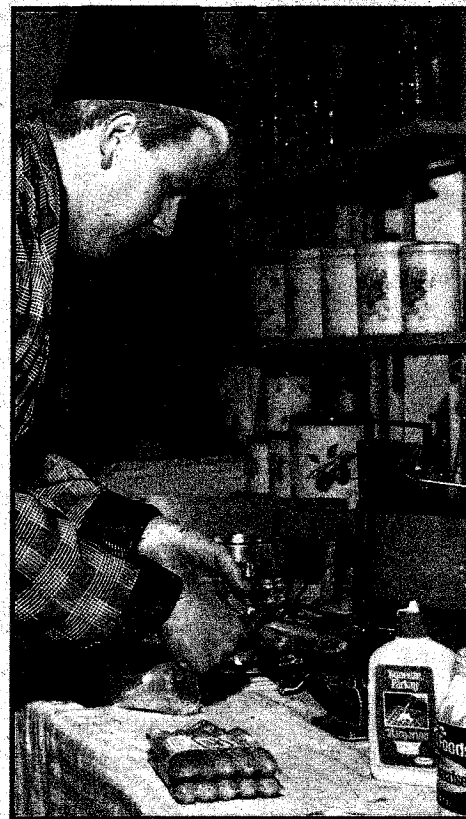
There are four Potatoes and two Tomatoes—Couchism has this gender distinction. For the most part, the Potatoes are got up in official viewing attire—old bathrobes, official Couch Potato T-shirts and fezzes. Until now the viewing has been small potatoes, so to speak, but the addition of our three sets puts seven screens into play, all tuned to different stations. There's a J.C. Penney set, a Singer, a Zenith, a color Sony tuned to harsh lavender (art!), a Teknika, a sepia Toshiba, a Sharp. The sound from all of them rises like an aural fog in the background.

"Hey!" one of the Potatoes suddenly exclaims excitedly, pointing at one set or another. "That's the guy who used to be on the original Danny Thomas show—what's his name . . . Rusty!" This is Chef Aldo, the Couch Potato nutritionist, and easy to identify in his chair apart from the couches, because he's surrounded by the kind of junk food on which the Potatoes thrive: U-No and Three Musketeers candy bars, cheese-flavored breadsticks, vari-colored cans of flavored pasteurized process cheese spreads, a tall loaf of Wonder Bread standing on end, generic beer and low-grade soft drinks. And, ominously, a small bottle of Pepto Bismol.

If your fine tuning is working, by now you should be getting the picture: The Potatoes are what you might call junk value elitists. They are

connoisseurs of culture's draff and chaff. Consider commandments IV and VI of the Ten Commandments of Couch Potato Etiquette: IV—Thou shalt eat food that is nourishing to thy Couch Potatoism; VI—Thou shalt have no other entertainments before me. They prize junk, not as a snack, but as a main course and *raison d'etre*.

We all watch now with crimp-mouthed dismay as Chef Aldo shows Julie how to make a popular Couch Potato treat. With a scissors he snips off the end of a package of weenies (a food H. L. Mencken once described as "a cartridge filled with the sweepings of the abattoir"). Then, using an electric hand drill, he bores out a single dog, scattering pink shards all over his lap in the process. Holding the eviscerated dog in one hand, with the other he takes up a can of Snack Mate Chive 'n' Green Onion Cheese Spread and sprays a mucilaginous jet of school bus-colored glop into the aperture. ("We don't have cuisine," he remarks. "I call it squeezine!") With that, he slaps the dog onto a slice of foam-rubber white bread, and then, then . . . as we spectators feel our sense of incredulity suddenly ossify, Chef Aldo makes a trough of bread and dog, fills the inside liberally with Hershey's chocolate syrup and—with a conjurer's flourish—proffers it to Julie. continued



At their farmhouse hideaway near Dixon, Calif., the Couch Potatoes gather for an evening of simul-viewing. At left, Chef Aldo prepares his highly original menu of junk food to accompany the multi-channel telethon.