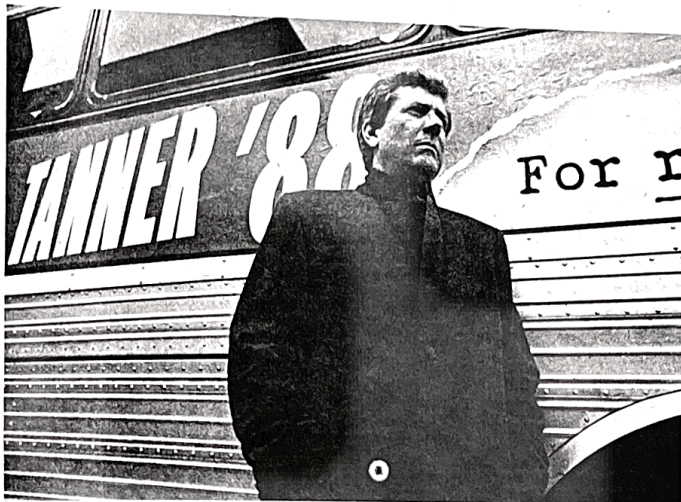


# TELEVISION EXPERIMENTS

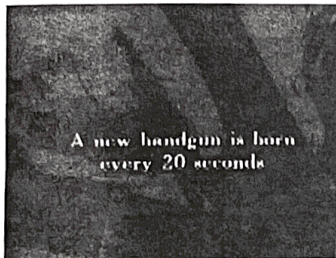


*Tanner '88* (11-part series), Robert Altman, 1988

**PROGRAM A:** "Dark Horse" (pilot), 60:00  
**PROGRAM B:** "For Real" and "Night of the Twinkies," 59:41  
**PROGRAM C:** "Moonwalker and Book Bag" and "Bagels With Bruce," 57:57  
**PROGRAM D:** "Child's Play" and "The Great Escape," 59:19  
**PROGRAM E:** "The Girlfriend Factor" and "Something Borrowed, Something New," 59:47  
**PROGRAM F:** "The Boiler Room" and "The Reality Check," 57:50

written by Garry Trudeau  
 with Michael Murphy, Pamela Reed, Cynthia Nixon, Daniel Jenkins, Ilana Levine, Matt Malloy, Wendy Crewson and E.G. Marshall  
 featuring Robert Dole, Gary Hart, Pat Robertson, Bruce Babbitt, James Blanchard and Kitty Dukakis  
 an HBO Production  
 courtesy of Circle Associates, Ltd.

In a stroke of sheer genius, renegade filmmaker Robert Altman and Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Garry Trudeau conspired to create a Presidential candidate, Jack Tanner (Michael Murphy), run him for office alongside the other Democratic and Republican hopefuls during the six-month-long 1988 Primary season, and videotape their performance art campaign like a news documentary. Each successive program was then cablecast on HBO, tying into the developments of unfolding Primary coverage. Mirroring, magnifying and compounding the actor-President age of made-for-TV campaigns, *Tanner '88* brilliantly confuses television's duplicitous distinction between the presentational and representational. With its intricate overlay of staged news events, improvised drama, sit-com mores, tabloid intrigue and "for real" politics, this fast and loose free-for-all comprehensively "covers" the ecology of contemporary electoral politics. *Tanner '88* is a triumphant return to television for Altman (who got his start there in the '50s), reminiscent of his great social satires of the '70s (*Nashville* and *A Wedding*) in its trademark sound design density and Dickensian orchestration of myriad characters.



*Buzz* (6 programs from the series), Jon Klein and Mark Pellington, 1990

**PROGRAM A:** #1, on the future; #2, on risk; 49:30  
**PROGRAM B:** #3, on stereotypes; #4, on commodification; 49:33  
**PROGRAM C:** #6, on heroism; #8, on censorship; 49:40

a production of MTV: Music Television in association with Channel 4  
 courtesy of MTV: Music Television

*Buzz*'s impressive achievement lies in how it refines the best of what MTV has done to popularize experimental visualization, and applies it to media-savvy explorations of social and cultural issues. With its hyper-edited commentary on themes such as racism, censorship and militarism, *Buzz* offers hope that television literacy can lead to political enlightenment for the music video generation. The first program (of its only season) lays out ideas that can be taken as the series' theoretical underpinnings, advocating the inevitability of appropriation and articulating conceptual futurism as a design approach. Heady stuff for a network also featuring *Headbangers Ball*, and co-creators/co-directors Jon Klein and Mark Pellington consistently test the limits of genre, venue and technology. Challenging television's capacity to cross-reference subject matter, and couching content in self-containing spectacle, *Buzz* qualifies what it conveys in indeterminacy and paradox. ("Percentage of people who refuse to participate in market surveys?" a text slate asks. "33%" is the sly reply.) If *Late Night With David Letterman* is the first postmodern talk show, *Buzz* is the first post-structural magazine show.



*Twin Peaks* pilot, David Lynch and Mark Frost, 1989, 94:42

directed by David Lynch  
 created and written by David Lynch and Mark Frost  
 with Kyle MacLachlan, Michael Ontkean, Piper Laurie, Joan Chen, Madchen Amick, Dana Ashbrook, Richard Beymer, Lara Flynn Boyle, Sherilyn Fenn, Peggy Lipton, James Marshall, Jack Nance, Ray Wise and Sheryl Lee  
 courtesy of Lynch/Frost Productions, Inc.

A measure of *Twin Peaks* extraordinary success at establishing its entirely inimitable vision is how much, after 30 episodes, we take for granted its ground-breaking auteurist approach to prime time television soap opera. Experimental feature filmmaker David Lynch and seasoned television writer and producer Mark Frost engage the genre as a paradigm for American cultural mythology, announced by the title sequence's heroic procession of Manifest Destiny's iconography—images of nature, water, power and industry that depict why the West was won. Almost every aspect of the masterful pilot episode exudes dream-like abstraction: the primal horror of the grieving parents, the FBI agent's uncanny prescience, the pervasive malevolence lurking beneath the "Our Town" setting, characters like the dead Laura Palmer or Agent Cooper's voice-recorder-invoked secretary that are merely event or gesture. In orchestrating this "dream-work," Lynch, as in his cinema, constantly pits the horrific against the histrionic. Inverting relationships between text and subtext through a meticulously choreographed series of mythic clichés, Lynch repeatedly pushes the audience out of the narrative and into television. *Twin Peaks* moves beyond genre parody to express how the co-dependency of evil and innocence is enacted and perpetuated by media archetypes.