

Alessandro Mercuri

Dallas

- City of Hate -

"The play is over!"

Pagliacci - opera by Ruggero Leoncavallo - 1892

Like a painting by Roman Opalka, some soap operas last a lifetime. The television series *The Young and the Restless* has thus been broadcast for forty years. In forty seasons, through springs, summers, falls and winters, a billion consumers (four times more women) have been able to watch more than ten thousand episodes—250 per year. At your own risk and in another dimension, you could watch continuously the entirety of the forty years of this soap opera (advert interruptions excluded) twenty-four hours a day, in one go: it will cost you, like a pregnancy, nine months of your life.

From the start of *The Young and the Restless*, the number of news and leisure television channels broadcasting programs without interruption has continued to multiply in an exponential manner. But actually the tens of thousands of channels in the world are relatively few in comparison with other TV programs, such as those of absolute reality consisting in the use of surveillance cameras. We do not count less than a million of them in France and thirty times more in the USA, filming day and night, in the rain and sun, against the light, in basements, from high places, inside or outside, in public spaces, in the private sphere, without even mentioning the video camera of your own mobile phone... in the palm of your hand. Thanks to the thirty-six million five hundred thousand TV channels and CCTV cameras, filming and broadcasting non-stop, humanity in a single year produces the equivalent of one hundred thousand years of video streams.

A new unit of measurement is born. The universe is surveyed in light-years, the earth as a fractal media-space in video-years. Already in 1995, Douglas Gordon increased the duration of fiction on the scale of reality. His work *5 year drive-by* revealed in real time the five-year quest of Ethan Edwards played by John Wayne in *The Searchers* by John Ford (1956). In two hours, the film recounted five long years of his journey wandering and searching for *the prisoner of the desert*. Douglas Gordon slowed down the screening so that the duration of the film corresponded to the duration of its story. *The Searchers* did not last two hours but five years.



Douglas Gordon, *5 year drive-by*, 1995

Courtesy: Gagosian Gallery, New York | Photography | © Douglas Gordon

Time regained...rekindled, set ablaze by *The Young and the Restless*, which for forty years has enflamed the hearts of its viewers with eternal love.

It has been found again.

What —Eternity.

It is the sea mingled

With the *The Young and the Restless*.

The adventures of *The Young and the Restless* take place in the state of Wisconsin, in a fictional town called *Genoa City*. Other series do not occur in imaginary places but in real ones, such as the series *Dallas* whose action takes place naturally in... Dallas. The most memorable character of the Texan oil-obsessed series was John Ross Ewing, nicknamed J.R. and played by Larry Hagman, himself a Texan, born in the city of Fort Worth, situated not far from Dallas. J.R., the fictional businessman, like other imaginary characters such as Tom & Jerry, Luke Skywalker & Darth Vader, has a *Wikipédia* page with the following portrait: *J.R. is a covetous, egocentric,*

manipulative and amoral oil baron with psychopathic tendencies, who is constantly plotting subterfuges to plunder his foes and their wealth.

Dallas was broadcast for fourteen seasons from 1978 to 1991. The adventures and the dramas of the Ewing family, the kings of oil and cattle breeding, took place under the regime of three presidents: Jimmy Carter (1977-1981), Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and George H. W. Bush (1989-1993). The first episode was broadcast shortly before the beginning of the 2nd oil crisis. The 357th and final episode was broadcast just as the 1st Gulf War was ending. Bearing the stamp of oil, crisis and black gold war, J.R. saw the Soviet Empire collapse. May 1989, 12th season, the 306th episode was entitled *Mission to Moscow*: “Is J.R. a traitor to his country... and his wife?” proclaimed a publicity slogan. *Dallas* ended in triumph. The 357th and ultimate episode entitled *Conundrum* was broadcast 48 hours after the publication of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. Jean Paul II, who had fought a long time against the Soviet Empire, condemned among others the horrors of communism. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics died in the first frosts of the winter of 1991. *Dallas* ended in the spring of 1991. Mission accomplished.



In 2012, after more than twenty years away, the soap opera, as if by magic, returned. The first season of the new series was broadcast in the summer. Thirty-four years after his debut in *Dallas* Larry Hagman was set to reappear in his role of J.R. But the actor died on November 23rd, 2012, after some months of shooting. On December 4th, the actress Linda Gray paid tribute to the memory of Larry Hagman in "*Entertainment Tonight*". Linda Gray played the part of Sue Ellen Ewing, wife of J.R. whom she divorced in 1981, only to remarry him the following year, before finally leaving him in 1988. Twenty years later, Linda became Sue Ellen once again. The relationship between the ex-lovers was tense, full of sadness and remorse. Contrary to the fiction, the relationship between the two actors is totally different: joyful, full of life and emotion, and overflowing with love like in a soap opera... but devoid of melodrama.



34 years later: *Dallas* 1978 - *Dallas* 2012

Linda Gray recounted their last meeting: *"He said, 'I've got two weeks to live!' We went, 'What are you talking about? Come on, we've got a scene on Monday ... you're not going anywhere.' That was the last time we saw him. (...) There's a vacancy. It's like where the Hell are you. You know, when I look around I expect him to walk in and say something crazy to Sue Ellen. I expect it. I know he is around though. He's around us all."*

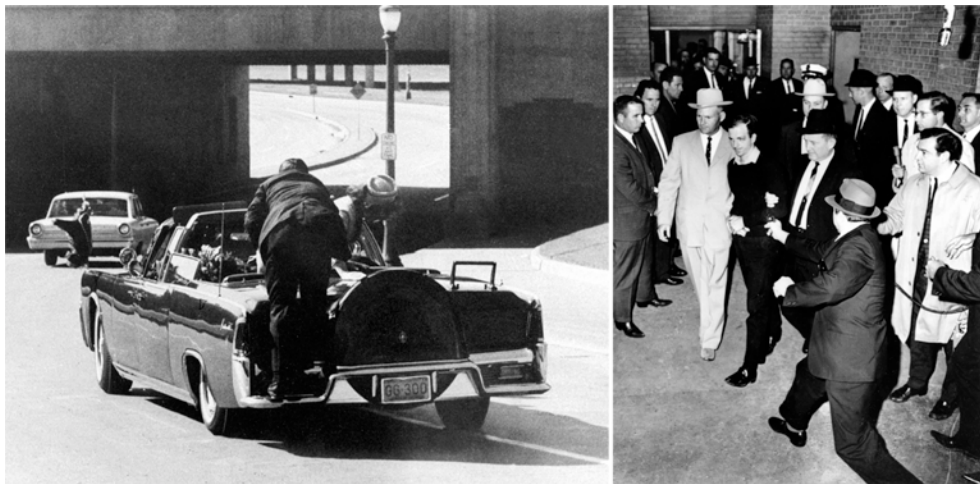


In 2012, twenty four years after their second divorce, would Sue Ellen, even if unconsciously, be still in love with J.R. without the actress knowing it? During her speech at the tribute ceremony to the actor Larry Hagman in Dallas, Linda Gray recounted this anecdote: *Mrs. Hagman used to call me on the phone and she'd say: "Hi wife, how are you're doing? And I'd say "Hi, wife, how are you're doing?"*

Larry Hagman, neither rigid nor ham-actor, but like an actor of extreme concision in a western movie, interpreted his role with a calm fury and petrified his victims, who drowned in his big blue eyes. Predatory smile and clenched teeth, as still as a statue, his face was coldly fixed and intense. With age, his eyebrows became twisted and pointed, increasing the diabolical dimension of the character.

Thus Larry Hagman disappeared on November 23rd, 2012 in Dallas. November 23rd is a fateful date for the city of Texas. The day after the

assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, on November 22nd, 1963, the city acquired for itself a sinister reputation. From this date forward, it would be nicknamed the “*city of hate*”. Late morning on November 24th, Jack Ruby, owner of nightclubs and striptease joints, parked his car near the headquarters of the police in Dallas. His dog Sheba stayed alone in his vehicle, looking at his master going away. Jack Ruby sneaked through the basements of the police station and shot Lee Harvey Oswald at point-blank range. A TV team which was on the premises filmed the scene live. Millions of viewers saw the murder of Kennedy’s assassin in real time.



Assassinations of John F. Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald
and of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby.

In 1988, twenty-five years after the assassination that traumatized a nation, “*D*”, a Dallas magazine, posed this question: “*Did Dallas kill Kennedy?*” Dallas, the city of bad omens? Like the song sung by Michel Salva during the opening credits of the French version of *Dallas*:

Dallas your ruthless world
Dallas glorifies the law of the strongest
Dallas under your relentless sun
Dallas you fear nothing but death

Dallas homeland of the dollar and oil

Dallas you do not know mercy

Dallas the revolver is your idol

Dallas you hang on to your past

Dallas woe to those who do not understand

Dallas one day they will lose their lives

Dallas your ruthless world

Dallas glorifies the law of the strongest

In 1995, some years after the final episode of *Dallas*, Larry Hagman played again the character of a business shark, not this time in the guise of John Ross Ewing but of Jack Jones, a sinister Texan millionaire ready to finance the presidential campaign of Richard Nixon. In *Nixon*, a film by Oliver Stone, Jack Jones and his associates suggested to the Republican candidate that Kennedy would soon be just a bad memory. The scene occurred on November 21st, 1963, twenty-four hours before the arrival of the Democrat President in Dallas.

The death of the actor was announced in such a way by the *New York Times*: *Larry Hagman, 'Dallas' Villain with Sinister Smile, Dies at 81*", saying that his character was one of the "*most beloved villains*". Can a character survive the death of his actor? Who else could interpret J.R. apart from Larry Hagman? Is the ghost of the character still wandering at night in search of his missing actor amid the limbo of the settings and the immensity and the cold of the vast TV studios? What to do with a character whose actor is now dead, apart from having him disappear in his turn? Screenwriters have all the answers. The death of J.R. will be replayed as a remake, taking us back in time, from 2012 to 1980.

On March 21st, 1980, the last episode of the third season of *Dallas* was broadcast, entitled “*A House Divided*”. Night interior, J.R. is alone at his desk. He receives an anonymous call but the person on the end of the line hangs up. The episode has almost ended. It is the last few seconds of the ultimate season. In subjective shot, a hostile presence sneaks in the dark. The suspense increases. Violins intensify. J.R. hears a door opening and asks “*who’s there*”. The suspense reaches its peak. Suddenly, two shots ring out. J.R. is hit and collapses. End credits. “*Who shot J.R.?*” Mystery.



No More Mister Nice Guy, season 4 - episode 1, November 1980 / While dusting the office of the oil magnate, a charwoman discovers the body of J.R.

“*Who shot J.R.?*” From now on the question would be on everybody’s lips. Some months later, on holiday in England, Larry Hagman met the Queen Mother, a well-known fan of the television series. An exchange followed between the Texan and the Windsor woman:

The Queen Mother:

'I am not going to ask you who shot you'.

Larry Hagman:

'I wouldn't say, not even to you, your majesty'."



Larry Hagman, his mother Mary Martin,
Bruce Forsyth and the Queen Mother Elizabeth in London, 1980

While the third season of *Dallas* ended with this unbearable secret, the presidential election campaign between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan began. Governor of California from 1967 to 1975, Reagan quit screen acting in 1964 after playing in “*The Killers*”, a color masterpiece of film noir directed by Don Siegel. At the end of the movie, Charlie Strom, a hitman played by Lee Marvin, assassinated his gangster colleague Jack Browning, played by an actor who would sixteen years later become the 40th president of the United States of America.



The Killers - Don Siegel, 1964

“Who shot J.R.?” Throughout the presidential campaign, the Republicans distributed thousands of official badges adorned with the catchphrase *“A Democrat shot J.R.”* The case ignited the world of betting. Bookmakers were inundated with requests. But who wanted the hide of J.R.? The amount of money invested went sky-high. Jimmy Carter joked that he would have no problem financing his campaign if he knew who shot J.R.



Let's stop messing around: four years earlier, in 1976, during the previous presidential election, Carter, who was then a candidate, promised that if elected, he would lift the state secret on... UFOs and make public all information concerning the observation of unidentified flying objects and possible extraterrestrial activity. The internet site of the very serious CIA (www.cia.gov) whose slogan is "*The Work of a Nation. The Center of Intelligence*", also reminds us that both presidents claimed to have seen UFOs in the past.

Reagan won the presidential election on November 4th. On November 21st, an answer to the question "*who shot J.R.?*" was finally given. CBS divulged the secret. "*Who Done it?*"—such is the title of the episode—broke all audience records, watched by 76% of TV viewers. The mysterious origin of the gunshots that sent the oil tycoon into the hereafter was revealed. The nation could finally breathe. J.R. was alive, on a drip, and being treated at the *Dallas Memorial Hospital*.

But some months later, in March 1981, on the 69th day of his mandate, Ronald Reagan suffered an assassination attempt in his turn. In less than two seconds, six shots were fired. All missed their target but the last bullet ricocheted off the armored body of the presidential limousine and perforated the lung of the president. "*Who shot Ronald Reagan?*" The criminal was found not guilty and not responsible for his actions due to psychiatric reasons.

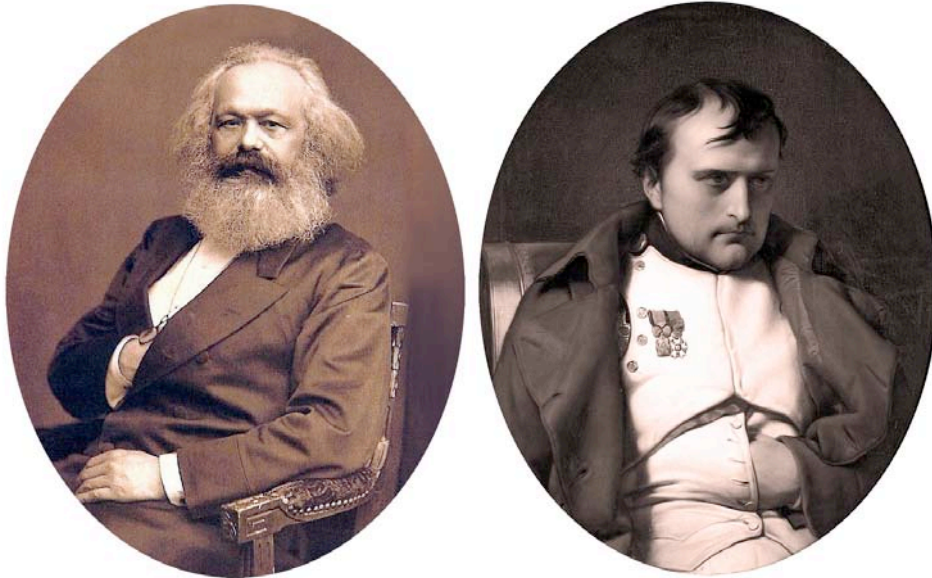
"Who shot R.R.?" The mentally unbalanced man dreamt of attracting the attention of the actress Jodie Foster and of impressing her. A victim of erotomania, he was persuaded that the Hollywood star, 19 at the time, was madly in love with him. Jodie Foster had become the object of all his obsessions since he had seen her in *Taxi Driver* by Martin Scorsese, in

which the taxi driver Travis Brickle played by Robert de Niro tried to assassinate... a senator on the presidential election campaign. We cannot emerge unscathed from fiction. We cannot get out of it. And all paths lead to Hollywood.



Cameras and secret services on alert during the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan

“Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” Thus begins *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* by Karl Marx (1851). Some weeks after the death of Larry Hagman, Cynthia Cidre, the writer-producer of *Dallas* could have endorsed this introductory sentence.



Portrait of Karl Marx - John Mayall (1875)

Napoléon (in reverse) - Hippolyte Delaroche (1845)

To echo the famous phrase “*Who shot J.R.?*”, Cynthia revealed that it would be impossible to erase J.R. as if nothing had happened, as if he had died of natural causes. *"JR was such a delicious and iconic character that we couldn't just kill him by natural circumstances." (...)* *"It had to be bigger than that, and more fun than that, and at the same time, it has to be emotional and a proper goodbye to both JR Ewing and Larry Hagman."*

J.R. will finally be assassinated in 2013, as he almost was in 1980. His funeral will be held during the 8th episode of the second season, plainly entitled: *J.R.'s Masterpiece*. And the character's death will occur in Dallas after the actor dies in the *Medical City Dallas Hospital*, situated in the city of...

In tribute to the diabolical cruelty and greed of the character, here is the list of the episodes of the original series *Dallas* in alphabetical order, broadcast in 14 seasons from 1978 to 1991. Fluctuating between film noir, westerns and melodramas titles, *Dallas* has the texture of soap but could not be more

abrasive. Yet note at letter B the recurring presence of *Barbecue*-based titles. As for the first title, it leaves no doubt about the strange collusion between the character and the actor, between fiction and reality, between *Dallas* the series and Dallas the city.

A Death In the Family - A Ewing Is a Ewing - A House Divided - A Tale of Two Cities -Acceptance - Act of Love - Adoption - After Midnight - After the Fall: Ewing Rise - Aftermath - And Away We Go ! - And the Winner Is... - Anniversary - Anniversary Waltz - April In Paris - April Showers - Bail Out - Bar-B-Que - Barbecue Two - Barbecue Three - Barbecue Four - Barbecue Five - Bar-B-Cued - Battle Lines - Bedtime Stories - Bells Are Ringing - Billion Dollar Question - Black Market Baby - Black Tide - Blackmail - Blame It on Bogota - Blast from the Past - Blocked - Blow Up - Brother, Can You Spare a Child? - Brotherly Love - Brothers and Sister - Brothers and Sons - Bypass - Call Girl - Cally On a Hot Tin Roof - Caribbean Connexion - Carrousel - Cat and Mouse - Changing of the Guard - Charade - Charlie - Check and Mate - Close Encounters - Comings and Goings - Conundrum - Counter Attack - County Girl - Crash of '83 - Crime Story - Cry Me a River of Oil - Cuba Libre - Curiosity Killed the Cat - Daddy's Dearest - Daddy's Little Darlin' - Dead Ends - Dead Reckoning - Dear Hearts and Gentle People - Deception - Deeds and Misdeeds - Déjà Vu Deliverance - Denial - Designing Women - Digger Redux - Digger's Daughter - Dire Straits - Divorce, Ewing Style - Do You Take This Woman ? - Double Wedding - Election - Ellie Saves the Day - En Passant - End Game - End of the road - Enigma - Ewing Inferno - Ewing vs. Ewing - Ewing-Gate - Executive wife - Eye of the Beholder - Fall of the House of Ewing - Fallen Idol - Family - Family Plot - Farewell, My Lovely - Farlow's Follies - Fathers and Other Strangers - Fathers and Sons and Fathers and Sons - Five Dollars a Barrel - Fools Rush In - For Love or Money - Fringe Benefits - Full circle - Gone with the Wind - Gone, But Not Forgotten - Goodbye, Cliff Barnes - Goodbye, Farewell and Amen - He-e-ere's Papa ! -

Head of the Family - Heart and Soul - Hell Hath No Fury - Hell's Fury -
 Hello-Goodbye-Hello - High Noon For Calhoun - Hit and Run - Home
 Again - Homecoming - Hush, Hush, Sweet Jessie - Hustling - I Dream of
 Jeannie - If at First You Don't Succeed - It's Me Again - J.R's Rising -
 Jamie - Jenna's ReturnvJessica Redux - Jock's Will - Jock's Trial - John
 Ewing III - Judgement Day - Julie's Return - Just Deserts - Ka-boooooom! -
 Kidnapped - Killer at Large - Last of the Good Guys - Last Tango in Dallas
 Legacy - Legacy of Hate - Lessons - Little boy lost - Lock, Stock and Jock -
 Lockup in Laredo - Love and Marriage - Love Stories - Lover, Come back -
 Lovers and Other Liars - Making of a Président - Malice in Dallas - Mama
 Dearest - Mark of Cain - Marriage on the Rocks - Masquerade -
 Mastectomy - Missing - Missing Heir - Mission to Moscow - Morning After
 - Mother of the Year - Mothers - Mummy's Revenge - My Brother's Keeper
 - My Father, My Son - Never Say Never - New Beginnings - Night Visitor -
 Nightmare - No Greater Love - No More Mister Nice Guy - Nothing's Ever
 Perfect - Odd Man Out - Offshore Crude - Oil Baron's Ball III - Old
 Acquaintance - Olio - Once and Future King - One Last Kiss - Out of the
 Frying Pan - Overture - Paradise Lost - Pari Per Sue - Past Imperfect -
 Paternity Suit - Penultimate - Peter's Principles - Phantom of the Oil Rig -
 Pillow Talk - Post Nuptial - Power Play - Pride and Prejudice - Proof
 Positive - Quandary - Ray's Trial - Real Life - Requiem - Resurrection -
 Return Engagements - Return to Camelot - Reunion - Revenge of the Nerd -
 Road Work - Rock Bottom - Rodeo - Royal Marriage - Runaway - Ruthless
 People - Sail On - Saving Grace - Second Thoughts - Secrets - Sentences -
 Serendipity - Sex, Lies and Videotape - Shadow Games - Shadow of Doubt
 - Shadows - Shattered Dreams - Showdown at San Angelo - Showdown at
 the Ewing Corral - Sins of the Fathers - "S" Is For Seduction - Sitting Ducks
 - Smooth Operator - So Shall Ye Reap - Some Do... Some Don't - Some
 Good, Some Bad - Some Leave, Some Get Carried Away - Something Old,
 Something New - Spy in the House - Start the Revolution with Me - Starting
 Over - Strange Alliance - Sue Ellen's Choice - Sue Ellen's Sister - Suffer

the Little Children - Sunrise, Sunset - Survival - Swan Song - Tangled Web
 - Taste of Success - Terminus - Terms of Estrangement - Territorial
 Imperative - The Best Laid Plans - The Big Ball - The Big Shut Down - The
 Brothers Ewing - The Buck Stops Here - The Call of the Wild - The
 Crucible - The Dark at the End of the Tunnel - The Deadly Game - The
 Decline and Fall of the Ewing Empire - The Dove Hunt - The Ewing Blues -
 The Ewing Connexion - The Ewing Touch - The Fabulous Ewing Boys -
 The Family Ewing - The Fat Lady Singeth - The Fire Next Time - The
 Fourth Son - The Gathering Storm - The Great Texas Waltz - The Heiress -
 The Investigation - The Kristin Affair - The Lady Vanishes - The Leopard's
 Spots - The Letter - The Long Goodbye - The lost child - The Maelstrom -
 The Missing Link - The New Mrs. Ewing - The Odessa File - The Oil
 Barons' Ball - The Outsiders - The Phoenix - The prize - The Prodigal - The
 prodigal mother - The Quality of Mercy - The Quest - The Reckoning - The
 Red File - The Road Back - The Search - The Second Time Around - The
 Serpent's Tooth - The Silent Killer - The Smiling Cobra - The Son Also
 Rises - The Sound of Money - The Southfork Wedding Jinx - The Split -
 The Sting - The Sweet Smell of Revenge - The Switch - The Ten Percent
 Solution - The Two Mrs. Ewings - The Unexpected - The Venezuelan
 Connexion - The Verdict - The Way We Were - The Wedding - The
 Wheeler Dealer - The Wind of Change - Things Ain't Goin' Too Good at
 Southfork - Things Ain't Goin' to Good at Southfork, Again - Those Darned
 Ewings - Those Eyes - Three Hundred - Three, Three, Three - Thrice in a
 Lifetime - Tick, Tock - To Catch a Sly - To Have and to Hold - Top Gun -
 Tough Love - Trial & Error - Triangle - Trompe l'œil - Trouble at Ewing 23
 - True Confessions - Tunnel of Love - Turning Point - Twelve Mile Limit -
 Twenty Four Hours - Two-Fifty - Unchain My Heart - Vengeance - War
 and Love and the Whole Damned Thing - War and Peace - Waterloo at
 Southfork - Wedding Bell Blues - Whatever Happened to Baby John ? -
 When the Bough Breaks - When the Wind Blows - Where Is Poppa? -
 Where There's a Will - Who Done It ? - Who's Who at the Oil Baron's Ball ?

- Will Power - Win Some, Lose Some - Winds of Vengeance - Winds of
War - Yellow Brick Road - 90265

Translated from the French by Paul Stubbs & Blandine Longre

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