

GIANNI PENZO DORIA

Asterix, the Others, and the Archives

The Cinema perception of the archival
profession

Preface by Micaela Procaccia



filo dal 1971 2008
diritto
editore

Gianni Penzo Doria

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Abstract

The negative perception that affects Archives and Archivists reduces our professional community into a little-known entity to the outside world. Finally however – unfortunately or fortunately – Archives, intended as the memory of a Creator, rise to become a sort of “safe of truth” accessible to all, of which nevertheless very few hold the key.

Stuffed with clichés, the authentic role of the Archivist – lost, in the common perception, amongst rats, silverfish and disorder, inside dark cellars and dusty attics – struggles to make its way in in todays society.

However, when this role emerges, it becomes a 360° human resource perfectly capable of dialogue with notarians, lawyers, managers or computer scientists, offering them new or unexpected perspectives not only thanks to the probative capacity but also as updated templates for record management, and more.

Keywords

Archives, Archivist, Cinema, Archival Job

Preface

by Micaela Procaccia

This paper deals with archives and archivists in the world of cinema, that is, it discusses how archival professionals and buildings dedicated to archival preservation are presented in movies.

Recently, the topic has been at the centre of archivists' attention (consider the meeting *Raccontare gli archivi con la macchina da presa*, held at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, on July 21, 2021), though it was addressed by Gianni Penzo Doria early on, as shown in the list of events organized by ANAI and in the introduction to this work.

This topic is periodically approached in the world of archives and archivists, especially when discussing the poor visibility of the archival sector and the lack of attention paid to it: the issue of the social perception of archives and, above all, of the role of archivists emerges more and more often in professional discussions and is also reflected here.

As we will see in the next pages, if an archives is sometimes considered an interesting location for different types of storytelling (all the Italian State archivists know that the famous *Pizzofalcone Police Station* is the subsidiary seat of the Archivio di Stato di Napoli), the figure of the archivist is still associated to boring and old stereotypes like employees working in half sleeves and in the dust, and archivists are considered as professionals in low ranks, poorly respected by their colleagues – with the exceptions referred to in the following pages.

Yet, the movies discussed here show a very slow positive change, even if limited only to the function of the archives as the place where the truth can be found and verified, and not involving the professional figure who must guarantee the archives' existence and correct functioning.

In a recent Netflix series (*When calls the heart*, 2014, deliberately excluded from this review), the inhabitants of a mining town take legal action against the company that caused the death of 46 miners, in a disaster due to non-compliance with safety rules. They win because they present as evidence an authentic record against one falsified by the company. Thus, the situation is reversed: the document kept in the company's archives is false while an authentic record is among the documents of the victim who gave the alarm in vain.

We must make an effort to eliminate the inconsistency between the perception of the archives, whose importance is slowly increasing in the world of cinema, and that of archivists, who are still considered as stiff and dull bureaucrats and even foolish servants. Maybe a bit of self-criticism will help archivists: they do not always succeed, where appropriate, to avoid technical language and self referentiality. Although, the lack of knowledge of the world of archives is the cause of the persistence of that smell of dust and mold that still seems to hover around archivists, even if they shook it from their clothes a long time ago.

Archivists must make a big effort to spread awareness of the central role of their work and their professional skills in society.

If our society aspires to efficiency, transparency and knowledge, it needs professional archivists, whose competences must be specific and clear.

Maybe one day a movie director will imagine a brave archivist who, confronting risks and dangers, saves an historical record, unveils a plot, defeats the evil.

Micaela Procaccia
ANAI President

The research area

Sometimes, the camera can be very effective in illustrating some concepts inherent to archival theory, even if only with images, especially for the purpose of teaching.

Our work was presented at four conferences, the first three held in 2010 and the fourth in 2011. The first time it was under the patronage of ANAI, in the context of *La Primavera archivistica (Archival Spring)*; the second during an event of the ANAI Piemonte; the third – in a shorter form – during the ANAI National Assembly that marked the passing of the presidency from Isabella Orefice to Marco Carassi; and the fourth at the University of Strasbourg¹.

¹ Università degli Studi di Padova – Archivio Generale di Ateneo, Associazione nazionale archivistica italiana, Sezione Veneto, Centro per la storia dell'Università di Padova, *La Primavera archivistica*, conference on *Professione archivistica al cinema*, presented by Francesco Piovan, May 10, 2010; Associazione nazionale archivistica italiana, Sezione Piemonte, conference on archives, archivists, archival science, presented by Diego Robotti, titled *Asterix, gli altri e gli archivi*, Torino, July 7, 2010; Associazione nazionale archivistica italiana, Assemblea nazionale, excerpt of *Asterix, gli altri e gli archivi*, Roma, December 3, 2010; Università di Strasburgo e Institut Universitarie de technologie – IUT Robert Schuman, *Themat'IC* international conference, titled *Que sont devenus les métiers de la gestion de l'information? Evolutions, identités, représentations*, Italian report about the identity and profession of the archivist in cinema, presented by Sophie Kennel and titled *Représentation des métiers de la documentation dans le cinéma: Asterix, les autres et les archives*, Strasbourg, October 7, 2011.

The title of this essay refers to the cartoon *Les douze travaux d'Astérix* and the film *Das Leben der Anderen*, which will be examined together with other movies that focus on archives, archivists and archival science. However, we are faced with a plethora of books, comics and movies that deal with themes close to our profession, some of which already successfully analyzed².

Thus, we have decided to choose among the movies those that we consider the most significant. In fact, we will not discuss movies such as *Le ragazze di Piazza di Spagna* (1952), *Il segno di Venere* (1955), *Il compagno di don Camillo* (1965), *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (1970), *Being There* (1979), *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), *The Net* (1995)³, *Murder at 1600* (1997), *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *La sconosciuta* (2006), *Firewall* (2006), *Invasion* (2007), or the recent *Soul* (2020), though they contain interesting scenes about the archival profession, and the best Hollywood actors and actresses played important scenes related to archives and

² VICENTA CORTES ALONSO, *La imagen de los archivos en el cine. Tres ejemplos*, «Boletín de la ANABAD», XXIX/2 (1979), pp. 21-27; GRAZIA TATÒ, *Archivi, archivistica e ... romanzi*, «Atlanti. Rivista di teoria e pratica archivistica moderna», XIX (2009), pp. 205-209; MARIA PROCINO, *La memoria raccontata. Tracce d'archivi lungo le strade della narrazione letteraria, filmica e televisiva*, «Nuovi Annali della Scuola speciale per archivisti e bibliotecari», XXIV (2010), pp. 159-174. Lastly, Rossella Manzo created a section of *Archiviando su Il mondo degli archivi nelle pellicole cinematografiche*.

³ Even Isabella Manzo talked about it, with more technical intentions, too. ISABELLA ZANNI ROSIELLO, *Gli archivi nella società contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009, p. 31.

archivists, from Meryl Streep to Julia Roberts, from Tom Hanks to Walter Matthau and so on⁴.

Furthermore, we will leave out of this paper movies and TV series which are often or periodically set in archives. They are generally based on a captivating mix of police, espionage, science fiction and horror themes, such as, for example, the *X-Files* series (1993-2002), *CSI – Crime scene* (2000-2015), *Cold case* (2003-2010), *RIS – Delitti imperfetti* (2005-2009), *Westworld* (2016 – in production), *Chernobyl* (five episodes in 2019) and the *James Bond – Agent 007* saga, still in progress, which has often scenes showing documents of secret archives the access to which is hard to obtain.

By the end of 2009, an invitation was sent to the *Archivi 23* mailing list to report on movies clips, books and comics, which to some extent referred to archives, and the participation was enthusiastic.⁵

⁴ Among the many references to archival themes in an elusive and impromptu form, see, merely by way of example, *Victory*, the movie directed in 1981 by John Huston, which opens with the request for a dossier concerning the death of a prisoner in a camp during the Nazi period.

⁵ M. ROMANATO, *Archivi 23, una mailing list tutta per discutere #comunicarchivi*, «Il Mondo degli Archivi», April 9, 2021. Occasionally, reports still arrive – both to the list and to my personal inbox – but here I would like to thank the colleagues and friends who contributed in the past and more recently: Loredana Arrabito, Isabella Bechini, Mario Alessandro Bembo, Simona Bertè, Alessandro Boretti, Dimitri Brunetti, Teresa Buccarelli, Cristina Covizzi (r.i.p.), Franco Cardin, Concetta Damiani, Italo Damiani, Laura Flora, Luca Milani, Remigio Pegoraro, Claudia Salmini and Maria Procino Santarelli. A big “gra-

2. Archival science and the archival system

Before analyzing movies, it is important to discuss the distorted representation of archivists as third-rate employees involved in repetitive procedures, careful to safeguard their solitude, surrounded by insects and dust, often avoiding light and human contact, isolated from the organizational context of the technostructure they operate in⁶. This blurred image of the profession was captured in a drawing made by Andrea Semerano for the publication of one of the most philologically rigorous conference papers on the relationship between archives and their organizational context, written by Renzo Scortegagna in 1998⁷.

zie” for the *Asterix in English* to Simona Bertè, Costantina Caruso, Luciana Duranti, Francesca Penzo Doria e Micaela Procaccia.

⁶ Interesting ideas for the mapping of professional figures can be found in HENRY MINTZBERG, *La progettazione dell'organizzazione aziendale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996. As it regards public organizations, it is worth reading *Management delle istituzioni pubbliche*, edited by Elio Borgonovi, Francesco Longo and Giovanni Fattore, Milano, Egea, 2015, especially concerning the relationships from which archivists, sometimes relegated to a marginal role, end up being excluded.

⁷ RENZO SCORTEGAGNA, *L'organizzazione e l'archivio*, in UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA, *Titulus 97. Atti della 1ª Conferenza organizzativa degli archivi delle università italiane*, Padova, October 22-23, 1998, edited by Gianni Penzo Doria, Padova, Cleup, 1999, pp. 21-36, even showing the numbering of the registers at the top right of the drawing.



In the context of this published paper unraveling the tangle of thoughts on archivists, Semerano also created, again on the recommendation of Scortegagna, a new image of the archivist, entitled *Il vero archivio*, more adherent to professional reality, where we find digitization, the study room and the teaching of history in a permanent exhibition:



The movies review presented here is divided into two parts; the first is dedicated to defeats, the second to professional redemption.

3. Archives as a dark place for a humiliating job

This section deals with the perception of the archival endeavour as a job, not as a profession. We will therefore come across many preconceptions existing in uncritical thinking, starting from illustrious examples, and allowing for the clearance of the most trivial clichés on archives and archivists.

3.1 Totò e i re di Roma (1951) – The commonplaces

Our journey has a first mandatory stop, *Totò e i Re di Roma*, a movie made in 1951, directed by Mario Monicelli and Steno. This movie represents the archetype of the collective imagination on archives and archivists. We could illustrate the movie subject in the following way: mice, *tòpoi* and other clichés.

In this movie, Totò plays Ercole Pappalardo, the chief archivist of a ministry, without revealing what ministry it is. Married, with a large dependent family, he experiences frustration in his workplace, where even the ushers receive coveted promotion or are nominated for the honorary title of *Cavaliere della Repubblica*. He openly complains that, despite being a *permanent employee of level C*, he has not obtained any recognition even if he applied for a promotion fifteen years before. The promotion is his own dream in the drawer and, unfortunately, he will never be able to achieve it.

Pappalardo makes a famous joke about the rats in the archives, one of which has just escaped his capture, even managing to deftly

steal the cheese from the trap. At that point, he lights up a candle with rat poison and, while an almost intoxicated colleague (played by Aroldo Tieri) enters, he exclaims: «Poisonous gas for mice. You'll see, if I don't take care of detoxifying the environment, our government will not really think about it».

In the meantime, a young assistant puts an idea in his mind by telling him that, at a lottery in Bari, an amazing win occurred. Thus, Pappalardo decides that, even at the cost of his own life, he has to try to get a similar win to improve the status of his family.



This archivist's story is a tragic comedy. Everything goes wrong! In fact, he proves to be very ignorant when he sends the Minister overseeing the archives a deranged letter of apology. He does not even pass the exam to obtain the primary school

certificate, essential not to have the desired promotion but to not be fired. Being older, he is made fun of by the young students doing the exam with him while he sits with them in the waiting room. He proves to be anxious and unaware of the circumstances, but also determined to try and succeed, despite his age. He opens the door to the examining room and introduces himself in an embarrassing way: «I am the “Almost Knight” Pappalardo, Chief Archivist of the Ministry».

Initially, the examining committee does not react when he gives the most bizarre answers to the oral exam questions, even about the *kings of Rome* (the question that gives the title to the movie). But, after having witnessed his heartfelt speech about his role as a family man and his economic difficulties, the committee becomes indulgent and sympathetic towards this man no longer young, to the point that he is almost getting the coveted diploma. However, when he stood up at the end of the exam, thankfully saying goodbye, the sarcastic and disrespectful Inspector Palocco bursts on the scene (this part is played by a very young Alberto Sordi, for the first and only time on the screen together with Totò). Returning after a scheduled absence of a few minutes from the school, he blocks Pappalardo's exit and, with an harsh and pedantic attitude, decides to continue the examination of the candidate, despite the embarrassment of the other members of the commission.

Palocco and Pappalardo had quarreled publicly once in the past, due to a Pappalardo's sneeze, interpreted as an involuntary spit by Palocco. Thus, Palocco attacks him with the most complex questions. For the purposes of this discussion, it is essential to

emphasize that the commissioner repeats 19 times the epithet “Mr. Chief Archivist!”, urging him to answer his questions, as if making a mockery of such a low title. The same mocking tone had also emerged in a previous scene, showing the schoolmaster’s famous parrot insulting the general manager, Langherozzi Schianchi, during a courtesy visit to the family.

Realizing the now inevitable failure, Pappalardo lashes out against Palocco and a full-blown scuffle emerges, which will result in the loss of all hope of promotion.



After this event, Pappalardo takes a final tragic decision: he will commit suicide in order to communicate the lottery winning numbers to his wife Armida from an improbable afterlife modeled on the earthly world. After paying 10,000 lire, he takes

with him to the grave the numbers he manages to get from a scalper three winning numbers for the Bari lottery game: 54, 33 and 89. After his death, his wife hears Pappalardo's voice giving her the numbers in her dream. The next day she plays the lotto and wins. She becomes a millionaire, to the joy of her family. She remembers the sacrifice of the head of the family, now deceased, and prepares herself to enjoy a better life.

The story does not end here, but presents other twists. Indeed, the figure of the archivist presents only an opportunity for more laughs, since the rest of the screenplay does not show any image related to the archives or to an archival professional role. Indeed, in the final scene, people speak of an anonymous ministerial employee and no longer of an archivist. However, the last few shots remain memorable. Arrested in the other world, the limbo, for fraud against the State, and dragged before the judge by two gendarmes, Pappalardo initially mocks him, mistaking him for President Harry Truman at the White House (called Casablanca, in office until 1953), but, worried that he will decide on his fate, he then changes completely his behaviour.

After a stormy reprimand on the committed crime, the judge is moved when he learns that Pappalardo has killed himself in order to give his family a better future. Thus, an happy ending is not late in coming. The Judge who knows everything but is ignorant of Pappalardo's profession, is shocked when learning that the Chief Archivist (here never specifically named) spent thirty years as a clerk in a ministry. This by itself makes Him forgive Pappalardo's crimes and sends him to Paradise.



Here is the dialogue with which the movie ends:

Pappalardo: «This is the first scam I've done in my life. If I had known, I would have started earlier, instead of spending thirty years – poor and honest – in a ministry».

The Judge: «Damn, I didn't know that! Why didn't you say it before, instead of saying so much asinine nonsense? Have you been a civil servant for thirty years? To Heaven!».

The movie also needs three final remarks, regarding the very severe censorship of the time.

The joke «And people criticize those who vote for the left-wing political parties!», pronounced by Pappalardo twice when he learns that a “simple” usher became *Cavaliere della Repubblica* (Knight of the Republic) was initially censored.

Indeed, initially the sentence was chosen as the title of the film, then censored without appeal. Instead, a joke about Alcide De Gasperi was dubbed apocryphally when, during the primary school exams, Palocco asked him for the name of a pachyderm. After receiving some furtive suggestions by the commissioners intent on helping him by using the imitation of large ears and a trunk, Pappalardo interpreted them with political irreverence and replied “*De Gasperi!*”.

The censorship, however, made the voice actor Carlo Croccolo change De Gasperi to *Bartali*, who was irrelevant to Palocco’s subsequent remark on the ongoing insults of the Chief Archivist against his superiors, among whom Bartali was certainly not included⁸.

The theme of suicide was not welcomed either by the critics, and was softened by the narration of an anonymous voiceover, substituting the dialogue with God, certainly more suitable to the bigots of that historical period.

Finally, the movie subject aimed to represent the film adaptation and the free synthetic reworking of two of Chekhov’s novels, *The Death of a Government Clerk* and *Exams for promotion*, but with completely different intentions and less depth, as remarked by the critics of the time.

⁸ ALBERTO ANILE, *Totò proibito. Storia puntigliosa e grottesca dei rapporti tra il principe De Curtis e la censura*, Torino, Edizioni Lindau, 2005, p. 50.

3.2 Una lucertola con la pelle di donna (1971) – The surprising promotion of the archivist

Una lucertola con la pelle di donna is a minor film, with ineffective psycho-thriller ambitions. However, it remains paradigmatic for the dialogue between Inspector Corvin, who arrived at the crime scene whistling nonchalantly, and the head of the forensic police, director of the archives until a week before.



«Excuse me, are you Inspector Corvin? I am Lowell, head of forensics».

«Since when?»

«A week. Before then I was the director of the archives».

«Ah, consoling!».

Then the dialogue continues, but it gets worse for the former director of the archives. While Corvin lifts a syringe to examine it, Lowell comes out with a joke, in perfect nerd style.

«Heroin. If anyone injected himself with such a dose, he would pass the sound barrier».

«It is a cute joke».

«Thank you».

«A typical archivist's joke».

The other scenes of the film have no appreciable importance for archives and archivists, but the two jokes mentioned above – sudden and sharp – immediately make clear the social welcome reserved for the profession.

3.3 *Hopsctch* (1980) – The staff file

Hopsctch is a movie inspired to the homonymous novel by Brian Garfield, published in Italy as part of the Mondadori *Secretissimo* series, starring Miles Kendig, a secret agent of the CIA, played by Walter Matthau. His perfect British behaviour is inadequate to the strict US regulations, especially in the eyes of his superiors. The Italian title (*Due sotto il sofà*) refers to a scene cut in the Italian reduction, during which the two protagonists find themselves drunk under the sofa, but which has little bearing on the entire cinematic script, which we will now examine.

Kendig, returning from his last mission, is demoted by his boss Myerson for failing to capture Yaskov, the head of the KGB.

What does his hierarchical demotion consist of? Obviously, it consists of working in an archives up to his retirement.

The dialogue is lashing but its fundamental parts deserve to be reported to demonstrate the precise perception of the archives, which is regarded, on the one hand, as a place for the imposition of disciplinary sanctions and, on the other, as an environment suitable for sedentary and boring employees doing repetitive tasks.

Myerson: «We're giving you a new job, Kendig. You will earn your bread until your retirement by working in our archives ... in the basement!»

Kendig: «Come on, Myerson! I am a man of action, I have always been a man of action».

Myerson: «If you're interested, I'll put your friend Joe Cutter in your place! [...] So, put your report together and then file it yourself on Monday morning».

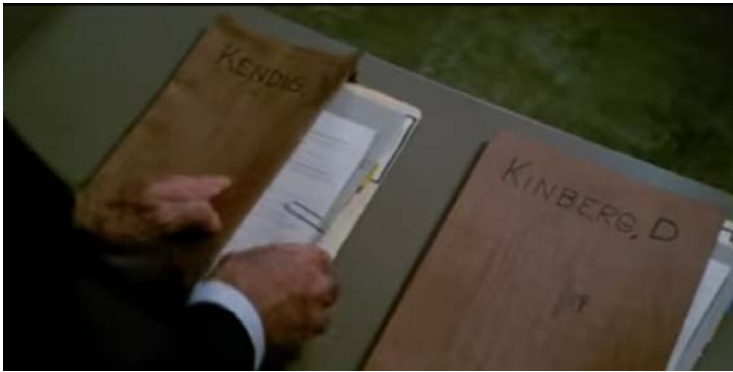
In that moment Kendig probably thought: «whoever does wrong the using the archives, should be wronged by confining him to the archives».

And so, after being thrown out the door of his boss' office, Kendig plays his cards. Before the information about his defenestration spreads, he goes to the CIA bunkers where the staff files are kept. These represent one of Myerson's weapons, by means of which he keeps employees in check.



He distracts the clerk on duty both at the entrance, by joking about the Washington Redskins, and at the exit, by predicting that they will win the next game against the Dallas team. Meanwhile, he informs Alex, the archivist, that he wants to consult the Kingberg file. In reality, he plans a clever move: he takes the records from his personnel file, stealing them away by inserting them in the Kingberg's file.

Then he arrives at a safe place, away from prying eyes, and passes the documents through the shredder, thus eliminating all of his official traces from the CIA Archives.



Later, he goes on with his plan and joins Isabel von Schonenberg (played by Glenda Jackson), an old close acquaintance of his and former CIA colleague, in Salzburg. One of their dialogues, which blunders about forgotten habits and confusing people, is an example of the perception of the archives as a place of punishment.

In fact, here's how Kendig illustrates his escape from CIA: «I'm out too. I'm done, but they don't know yet. They put Myerson in charge of my section. He wanted to lock me up in an archives»⁹.

However, shortly thereafter, he states about Myerson and the power of archives: «He keeps under lock the files of staff. Everyone is scared».

⁹ Indeed, in a joke with his former colleague Cutter, he affirms, with respect to the punishment in the archives: «Myerson tried to castrate me [sending me to the archives] and I paid him back».

One of the dialogues is also interesting for the digital issues it mentions. In fact, Isabel von Schonenberg tells the reasons for her resignation from the CIA: «Everything once was clearer. You knew what you did expect: the bad guys wore mustaches. Now you need a computer to know who's the good or the bad ... and if it breaks down it's a big mess».

And so, how to take revenge? On the basis of official documents, Kendig writes a memoir which will be a bestseller; thus, he becomes a millionaire. However, he is forced to continually escape the attempts of capture by his former colleagues. Thus, he simulates his own death in a plane crash, after a daring escape and a shooting, causing the plane to explode while flying. This way, he manages to escape forever from the CIA agents, who are enraged and still intent on hunting him down.

3.4 Brazil (1985) – The dreaming archivist

Often forgotten, Brazil is a masterpiece of international cinema, written, directed and produced by Terry Gilliam. Freely adapted from George Orwell's *1984*, one of its actors is Robert De Niro, who plays the part of a data terrorist. The main character is Sam Lowry (Jonathan Price), an archivist employed by the Ministry of Information, who, because of the sadness of his monotonous and ritual life, often indulges in dreamlike moments, during which he imagines himself as a winged superhero saving a mysterious woman he is madly in love with.

One day an insect (the famous *bug*), stuck in a printer, causes an identity error and then the death under torture of an innocent. Sam oversees the process correcting the mistake and goes to the house of the widow to compensate her on behalf of the State, but nearby he meets Jill, the woman he dreams of. However, after learning that Jill has been listed as a terrorist by the Ministry, he tries every way to save her and finds nothing better than tampering with the data of the central information system to record her death, thus making her escape from the police.

However, the police eventually gets on their trail and arrests them both. They will only be able to escape after an armed attack that will blow up the Ministry. The two lovers thus find refuge in a country house until ... Sam awakens to a bitter reality. This was a dream. Then Sam was asleep. Now in a catatonic state, tied to a torture chair after fainting, Sam is let by the police sing obsessively *Aquarela do Brasil*, the musical theme which suggested the title of the film and that constitutes its entire soundtrack.

Some sentences are memorable for our profession. Among these, the scene of the documentary forms deserves a mention: without forms, it is not possible to report the arrest due to an identity mistake without going before to the Stamp Office. The dialogues about an archivist's job are equally memorable. While speaking to an old friend, Sam tells him: «I expected everything, except to find you here in the archives. Do you have problems»? And, shortly after, he hears the answer: «If there's anyone I'm worried about, Sam, it's you. I mean ... I mean, Sam, what happened to you? You work in the archives, ... you were one

of the smartest, I don't understand ... Sam, let a friend tell you: you are wasted here. The archives is a secondary department, you will never be able to make a career: it is impossible for anyone to notice you».



In one of the following scenes, Sam is promoted to another position by the Ministry director, who has learned that Sam has solved the case of the bug and is under his wealthy mother's strong pressure.

Before Sam took office and while he was leaving, the director exclaims, with Sam behind him and without dignifying him with a glance: «I said that you were certainly wasted there in the archives»!



The scene takes place between the gloomy corridors of the ministerial undergrounds where each office has an alphanumeric code. After a view of the silent corridors, the director is seen to arrive accompanied by the noise of a group of obedient officials and journalists ready to be his subjects, who follow him rhythmically with pirouettes, almost as if in a dance.

Sam is given the DZ-015 office and a badge with the name of the office, not his own. The director deftly hangs it on his jacket pocket, giving him two slaps on the shoulder, while he greets him hastily and without compliments, disappearing through the corridors with the large group in tow while he continues to answer questions, like a perfect bureaucrat.

During another dream vision, while he was dozing off in a room with a high ceiling but narrow to the point of feeling locked up, Sam dreams of escaping from the archives, which now makes

him claustrophobic, and here is the movie's stroke of genius. The archives itself bursts onto the scene, in an anthropomorphic version, very reminiscent of *The Thing*, aka Ben Grimm from *Fantastic 4*, the famous Marvel comics. His beloved Jill throws some ropes at him but, as he runs towards her to escape, the stone humanoid archives emerges from the underground, grabs Sam by his legs and does not let him escape.

The monologue by the archives, accompanied by an epic soundtrack, is ridiculous and, at the same time, full of *pathos*:



«Sam, Sam ... Don't go, stay in the Archives. I need you!», the archives said almost in a whisper and with a dull tone, inadequate for a stone monster. Thus, Sam will continue to imagine an escape that he will never be able to realize, if not – as we have seen – in the world of his dreams.

3.5 Blade (1998) – The *blob* archivist

A fierce Wesley Snipes plays Eric Brooks, nicknamed *Blade*, but also *The Daywalker*, half man and half vampire, who tries to protect humanity from the invasion of vampires, who murdered also his own mother. Endowed with supernatural powers, during the entire movie, he pierces human-like monsters with his sword, recording movie sequences halfway between horror and science fiction.

The movie, the first one of a successful trilogy (*Blade II* – 2002 and *Blade Trinity* – 2004), is based on the Marvel comics, written in 1973 by Marv Wolfman and drawn by Gene Colan¹⁰. There are two scenes in which the protagonists move across the archives, shot with a circular overview and a tracking shot. In one of these, Blade decides to kill the archivist, Pearl, who is employed in the Erebus Archives, located in the smelly basement, mainly due to the stench of Pearl himself.



¹⁰ There are similarities in Raymond Rudorff, *The Archives of Dracula*, Rome, Gargoyle, 2009.

Pearl is a man's carcass, imposing and disturbing at the same time, with a shrill and unpleasant little voice, which begs for mercy when he notices Blade's presence, while a stinking fart comes out. The vampire archivist, slumped on his own fat like a shapeless mass, a blob, will end up roasted by ultraviolet rays for having eluded Blade's questions. From an archivist's point of view, this is one of the most horrifying scenes in the history of cinema. Just an interesting paradigm, nothing to add.

3.5 Julie & Julia (2009) – A poor archivist

Julia Child, played by Meryl Streep, who will get the Oscar nomination, is a failed writer. At first for pleasure, then as a full-time job, she delights in cooking, even writing a monumental work with a literary and culinary theme and starting a successful business as a blogger. And, she does it while she follows her husband, a US diplomat, around the world on business.



At a Valentine's dinner with some friends, a guest suddenly asks her a question: «Were you spies?» And she, with her hand on her heart, replies: «I was just a poor archivist». In fact, as we know from the original plot and dialogues, she was an insurance employee, a role that we will address in § 4.1.

4. Archive as a professional rematch

This section will discuss the issue of the archival professional's redemption, especially as manager of the memory and records of every public and private organization, but with a distinction. While the archivist continues to make a bad impression in almost all the scenes we will examine, the archives continues to be a bulwark for knowledge and for evidence of actions.

4.1 Fail-Safe (1964) – Archivists as masters of organization

Directed by Sidney Lumet in stunning black and white, Walter Matthau stars, playing the role of prof. Groeteschele, a political-military advisor of the Pentagon. The movie focuses on the nuclear attack that will cause the destruction of Moscow, triggered by an electronic failure of US planes. To preserve peace and avert nuclear war, the Americans themselves bomb New York.



The dialogue in a high society living room is relevant: Groeteschele is invited to answer the question, defined as an *interesting question* by the professor himself, about who the survivors would be in the event of a nuclear war. «I will predict – Groeteschele says – convicts and file clerks. The worst convicts, those deep down in segregation cells and the most insignificant file clerks, the employees of the big insurance companies, because they live in fireproof rooms, protected by tons of the best insulation in the world, paper! And imagine what could happen: a small group of dangerous convicts against an army of file clerks for the conquest of the remaining sources of life. The convicts will know violence, but file clerks will know organization. Who do you think would win?».



Here the role of the archivist, indeed *records manager*, is exalted: capable of organizing the memory of a records creator through the figure of *middle manager*.

4.2 La caduta degli dei (1969) – Archives as means of social control

This masterpiece, directed by Luchino Visconti, is the first of the director's so-called German trilogy. It focuses on the skills of the von Essenbeck family, able to act in any financial and political context, and it has Germany in the first half of the twentieth century as its background. In a famous walk along the highly scenographic shelves of the SS Archives, the power-hungry Nazi hierarch Aschenbach whispers a very interesting sentence to Sophie von Essenbeck: «This is the most complete archives that has ever existed, here there is all of German private

life, nothing is missing. You can even find your story and that of Friedrich ... Can you imagine? You see, it is not very difficult to enter people's private lives ...».



Therefore, the archives is a mean for those who aspire to the social control of citizens, following a very realistic and pervasive vision of totalitarian regimes as it is in much literature about the subject.

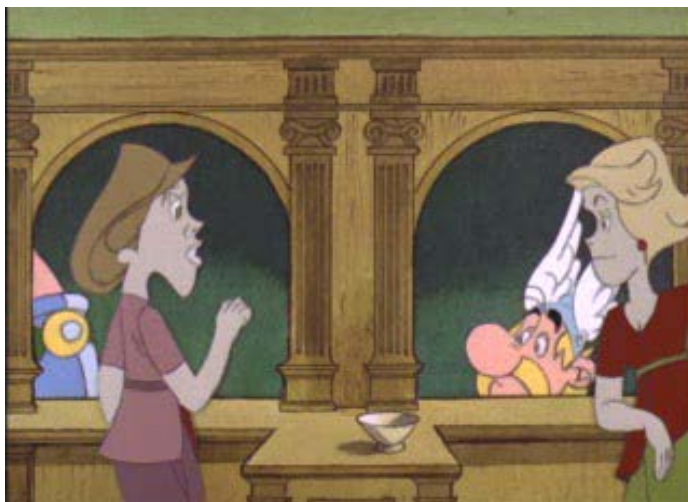
4.3 *Les douze travaux d'Astérix* (1976) – The certifying force of the protocol register

Failing to defeat the Gauls, Julius Caesar decides to break the delay and meets their leader, Abraracourcix. After a negotiation, the proposal is simple and has some very tempting consequences: the warriors of the Gaul village will have to accomplish twelve labors, inspired by the famous ones of Hercules; if successful, they will obtain the Roman Empire. Otherwise, even the failure of a single test will result in the surrender of the Gauls to the Roman legions.

The village elects Asterix and Obelix as its champions, while Julius Caesar appoints Caius Pupus as a guardian to ensure fairness during the tests. After the first seven, the eighth labor consists of obtaining the A-38 pass, released in a large building called “the house that makes you mad”, with a structure very similar to a ministry.

Initially, we witness the bouncing phase of the process during which the user moves from one office to another, without offering or even only proposing any solution. After quick comings and goings, with Obelix exhausted by the fast ups and downs between the corridors and the stairways, Asterix has a stroke of genius and produces a formal request for a non-existent A-39 pass. The two startled officials – more intent on filing their nails with a very snobbish air, rather than following what was going on – with a gasp refer to the evidential value of the archives, because, in order to know the actual existence of the A-39 pass ... «You

should go to the office of the coordinator of the archives and protocol register».



Basically, the bureaucrat is a victim of his own behavior, so much so that the prefect will unwittingly hand over the A-38 pass to the Gauls, in a story that also recalls Flaiano's famous reflections on form H¹¹.

¹¹ Ennio Flaiano, *Diario notturno*, Milan, Adelphi, 1994: «They present the project to streamline the bureaucracy to the general manager. He warmly thanks. However, he deplores the absence of the H form. He concludes that he will pass the project, for a prompt examination, to the competent office he is creating».

4.4 L'archivista (1985) – The surly guy who solves mysteries

A TV movie, shot between the arcades and the squares of Bologna in 1985, was only broadcast on RAI in 1988. The main character, played by Flavio Bucci, is Ugo Poli (or rather, Poli Ugo), a deputy police inspector who remained lame due to an accident and, for this reason, was removed from professional commitments in the field with an “exile”, as he defines it, in the archives. He always goes around accompanied by his inseparable stick, which he does not hesitate to shake at his colleagues when they dare to call him “the Lame”. Having become introverted, grumpy and asocial, practically an anti-hero, he becomes passionate about archival research and begins to pick up the files of closed and unsolved cases (a sort of *Cold case*, we could say, *ante litteram*).



The most interesting aspect of the story is that he resolves the cases, without following rules and procedures, but keeps the solutions secret from his superiors, since he always refers to them with contempt. Having found the last culprit, who asks him what he intends to do, whether to report everything to the judiciary, he says «I am paid to file, Your Excellency; and I archive, archive, archive ... ». Then he goes back to the office, sits down in front of the files of the three cases he has solved and affixes on them the stamps for the transfer to the warehouse, banging them hard on the table, exclaiming to himself again, almost in a charge of self-esteem: «And with this there are three cases that I have solved. I am paid to file. Good; I archive, archive, archive ... ».

Here the archivist is a character to stay away from, but able to perfectly use the archives as a deadly tool.

4.5 Agnes of God (1985) – The archives that reveals the secret passage

In this movie, Jane Fonda plays Martha Livingston, a psychiatrist appointed by the judiciary to investigate the very young Sister Agnes, a nun in a monastery in Montreal, found – screaming and frightened – in a pool of blood with a newborn strangled with an umbilical cord at her side.

After evaluating each clue, between reality and hallucinations of the young girl due to her unstable equilibrium, Livingston is convinced of her innocence and begins to carefully investigate in any direction.

Thus, she attempts to disprove the basic premise, endorsed by all

the nuns of the monastery: during the night, no stranger could ever enter in the building, just as no one could have gone out.



Searching the archives (once again used by the movie director as part of the scenography), she will discover from a map a secret passage that leads to the bell tower, taking notes on a notebook she places clumsily on top of the drawing. Crossing that basement, Agnes went to the bell tower, where she was raped by a stranger and got pregnant. Although guilty of infanticide, she will be exonerated for being incompetent, while the inferences of the nuns about the divine punishment, according to which they had interpreted the incident, will cease.

4.6 Philadelphia (1993) – The rediscovered file

Two big actors – Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington – as well as a legendary Academy Award soundtrack, composed by Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young – introduce us to a dramatic story that really happened.

It is the discrimination of Andrew Beckett, a gay lawyer afflicted by AIDS, which was at the time a terrible and almost fatal disease, also linked to divine punishment, who was fired for “right cause” by the law firm where he worked. After numerous twists and turns – between isolation and social acceptance – Beckett will die overwhelmed by the disease three days after the sentence that awarded him a compensation of four and a half million dollars.



In one of the movie scenes, his lawyer Joe Miller tells him, after having found relevant correspondence, which has obviously ended up in the archives: «We were going crazy to find that

appeal, I felt like I was on the edge of reality. It was in the Records center. Records center? Yes, all documents and files are placed in the Records center when the case is closed».

Scenes of ordinary oblivion of the archival function, but in which the archives stands in defense of the rights of citizens.

4.7 In the name of the father (1993) – Hidden documents

The next two movies here analyzed concern the history – a long and tragic one – of the independence of Ireland and the civil war started by the independence activists of the Irish Republican Army, better known as IRA.

In the name of the father (which has not to be confused with Marco Bellocchio's movie in 1972) tells the legal battle waged by some people, including a father and his son, unjustly accused of an attack in a Guildford pub, imputed to IRA, causing the death of five innocent people. The movie is inspired to a true story, told in the book *Proved Innocent* by Gerry Conlon, the son who survived his father, who died in prison and in whose name (hence the title of the story) he will ask for justice.

The defense is carried out by Gareth Peirce, masterfully played by Emma Thompson, who fights with great determination to gain access to the file of Giuseppe Conlon, Gerard's father.

When she gets the court order, she rushes to the police archives, but is greeted by a police archivist, who in an annoyed and detached tone sets out – in the form of constraints – all the rules for consultation, so as to sound like a litany.



Without even responding to the greeting, standing, hands clasped, sighing while outlining the consultation procedures, designed to annoy anyone, without giving the lawyer a direct look, and with the sole and implicit goal of hindering the search, he begins: «There are some rules to observe. This is a complete list of the dossiers on the Conlon Giuseppe's crime, the only ones you can examine. I'll take them from the filing cabinet and bring them to you. In front of me you take one page at a time, read it and give it back to me».

Because of the evident lack of cooperation, she turns to the chief inspector and asks:

«Is there any problem, Mr. Dickson»? «Problems? Not at all, Miss Peirce! Our chief archivist Jenkins is here to help».

Thus, the chief archivist continues using the same tone, without blinking:

«If you want to make copies, I will do them and you will always have to use this pen for any notes. If you alter any records, we will

be able to identify you with this pen; national security issues are at stake, Miss Peirce! We don't want secret police information going to the IRA, that's right, isn't it)?

One day the case turns in favour of the alleged culprits. The chief archivist falls ill (it is reasonable to assume from a cold transmitted to him by Pierce, who had awkwardly sneezed on a document to be copied) and his replacement is at the counter, trying to send her back and return the following day. After a brief insistence, she obtains to go through the file. The deputy archivist makes a double mistake (both in not verifying the subject of the court order and in giving information on other files) and states: «Here there are two of Conlon. Who is him: Giuseppe Conlon or Gerard Conlon»? The lawyer immediately understands her opportunity, lights up and asks without hesitation for the file of the son Gerard, which the deputy archivist gives her without objection.

By consulting the file, she finds evidence of the innocence of the accused, discovering the hidden testimony of several passersby who had cleared them. In addition, among the records in the file, a delivery note for consultation is stapled: «Not to be shown to the Defense», which she cleverly subtracts to take it to court.



Faced with such overwhelming proof of innocence, the judge will only be able to declare a mistrial and free the Irish people unjustly imprisoned. Indeed, the words of the judge concern one of the meanings of the verb to archive: «In the trial brought by Her Majesty against Gerard Patrick Conlon the lawsuit is immediately dismissed!», while the crowd rejoices and expresses its anger for the hidden evidence.

4.8 Micheal Collins (1996) – The archives of the secret services

The same subject of *Das Leben der Anderen*, which we will examine later, is also in *Michael Collins*, the story of a politician who lived between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this movie too, as in *In the name of the father*, there are the secret services of Her Majesty against the Irish independence activists of the Irish Republican Army – IRA, headed by Collins, who later would also led Sinn Féin, the separatist party.

The movie has no dialogues related to archives; however, in one of its sets, essential to understand the information owned by the English government, we find the protagonist consulting the archives of the British Secret Service, and impressed by the wealth of details about private lives. Almost discovered, he clings to the beams of the archives, remaining suspended for a long time, without being identified.



The movie won the Golden Lion at the Venice festival, while the Volpi Cup was assigned to Liam Neeson, as best actor in the role of Collins. Among the actresses we also find Julia Roberts, interpreter of Kitty Kiernan, the woman disputed between the leaders of the separatists, but who will not be able to fulfill her dream due to the violent death of Collins during the civil war unleashed by internal political opponents.

4.9 Erin Brockovich. Strong as the truth (2000) – The stupid archivist

Erin Brockovich, played by a dazzling Julia Roberts (who won the Academy Award and the Golden Globe), after two divorces and with three children to support, must find a job to make ends meet. Having lost a case for damages due to a car accident she suffered because of the language she used during the trial, she is breaking and begs her attorney to find her “any” job.

Even if other employees do not like it, she is given the task of putting in order – as secretary archivist – the files of the law firm. Thus, in arranging the building files inherent to a real estate practice, she notices that the documents demonstrating the illegal conduct of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company which had spilled hexavalent chromium into the aquifers of Hinkley (California) have been covered up.

Chromium +6, in fact, used as a rust inhibitor, is a highly carcinogenic substance; it can even modify DNA and cause tumors in the inhabitants, together with numerous inconveniences for the population.

With sagacity and determination, despite an exuberant temper and language, she manages to gradually involve the inhabitants of the place. The tip that Erin receives from a university professor, just interviewed on the issue, is exemplary:



«I wouldn't go publicizing what you're looking for if I were you. The offending documents disappear easily when there is a stink of trouble».

While Erin is an enterprising archivist-investigator, intelligent, stubborn, and driven by civic duty and a sense of justice, on the other hand, Scott, the archivist of the County Water Consortium of jurisdiction, the Lahontan Regional Water Board, does not make a good impression.

Indeed, he is a sucker trying to fix roughly his hair as soon as he sees her arrive, then awkward and clouded by the graces displayed on the counter by a winking and apparently free woman. Erin even asks him to provide her with «all kinds of papers from all kinds of places» a request that would be rejected in every archives».



After telling him she is no longer married and offering him an unusual compliment, «I love your pants», she asks and obtains to be left alone to consult the files, without the necessary supervision, and makes several copies. Then, she dismisses the archivist without too many compliments, «I'll call you if I need anything». She is allowed to remain in the archives for many hours and finally manages to find evidence of the elimination of the documents charging the Pacific Gas and Electric Company.



After being fired because of her absence from work, due to spending a week in archival research, she decides to start the lawsuit. Eventually, the court will deliberate in her favour, with compensation of thirty-three million dollars, two of which for her.

The lawsuit, in fact, had been built on incontrovertible documentary evidence, with the accusation supported by a massive amount of evidence that Erin had managed to obtain thanks to her sagacity in investigating primary sources.

In this movie we witness a dichotomy: while the archivist is relegated to the role of a fool, the archives becomes an essential instrument of knowledge, democracy and justice, capable of preserving and protecting rights, duties and legitimate expectations on the part of all.

4.10 Star Wars II, The attack of the clones (2002) – Quod non est in actis non est in mundo (apparently)

The second episode – the fifth in the Star Wars saga – directed by George Lucas, contains three scenes of great interest to archives and archivists. In the first, Obi-Wan Kenobi is looking for the planet Kamino, because he correctly fears that, on the mysterious oceanic planet, the forces of evil, led by Earl Dooku, are gaining strength with an army of clones produced on the archetype of Jango Fett, the bounty hunter. The result would be an army formed by particularly ferocious, cruel, and pugnacious soldiers.

While looking for the planet, he talks in a bar with Watto, a longtime friend, who suggests that he consults the Jedi Archives, in a way that is not exactly kind to the archivists' profession: «It's easy to find, even for those droids of yours from the archives».



In the archives study room, Obi-Wan Kenobi is unable to locate the planet in the galactic cartography. Thus, he turns to the Jedi archivist-librarian, Jocasta Nu, a very elegant and austere lady, in an unforgettable dialogue.

«Did you call for help? Any difficulties, Master Kenobi?»

«Yes, I am looking for a planetary system, called Kamino, which does not appear on the archives' maps».

«Kamino, uhm ... actually it's the first time I've heard of it. Are you sure you have the right coordinates?».

«According to my information, it should be in this quadrant, south of the Rishi maze».

«I hate to say, it looks like the system you are searching for doesn't exist».

«Impossible! Perhaps the archives are incomplete ... ».

«If an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist».



This forces Obi-Wan to turn for further help to Master Yoda, who gathers the Padawans around him to find a possible answer to the riddle.

After a brief reflection, one of the boys suggests the solution, very simple and devastating for the archivist's apodictic self-confidence: «Because someone erased it from the archives memory».

After agreeing with him, Yoda states: «That's what happened! Someone erased it!» And Obi-Wan: «But Master Yoda, who could have erased information from the archives? That's impossible, isn't it?»

Yoda: [Frowning] «Unsettling and dangerous, this enigma is».

A fundamental consideration emerges from this event. The archives provides incontrovertible documentary proof of all activities that are documented and the records of which are preserved, but critical research can never be limited to the control of a single primary source. The rigorous researcher will necessarily have to walk the paths of archival infinity through a dense network of references with a thousand variables that are always open¹².

¹² On the subject, in addition to the ideas of Claudio Pavone, reference is made to Isabella Zanni Rosiello, *Andare in archivio*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996, above all § 4, *Le domande da porsi* and to Angelo Spaggiari, *Archivi e istituti dello Stato unitario. Guida ai modelli archivistici*, Modena, APD School of the State Archives, 2002, both bases for Gianni Penzo Doria, *Le strutture anagrammatiche dell'archivio*, «Il Mondo degli Archivi», for the column *Il potere degli archivi*, July 20, 2020.



On this issue, a phrase by Rossin is interesting: «Choosing the archives image to reassemble and re-enact in a documentary movie montage is completely analogous to the choice that the historian makes when he comes across a document, captures and rearticulates the meaning, and finally assigns it a real evidentiary role. The questions the historian-filmmaker poses through editing and those the archives asks him in turn, are always influenced questions: the historian's question should always have within itself an idea of the documentary sources and of the archives and, at the same time, a precise theoretical-practical framework to analyze them»¹³.

The character of Jocasta Nu deserves another brief reflection. For ten years, counted as BBY, she was a member of the Jedi Council, but she chose to return to perform the functions of archivist and librarian out of passion and thanks to a love for

¹³ FEDERICO ROSSIN, *Cinema e storia. Immagini d'archivio e uso politico nel cinema documentario*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2016, p. 10.

knowledge, which she expressed with a famous sentence: “There is more knowledge here than anywhere else in the galaxy”.

Archives, therefore, are knowledge and knowledge is power.

4.11 V for Vendetta (2005) – The guarantee of a traditional archives

Another movie about the relationship between totalitarian regimes and, marginally, the archives, is *V for Vendetta*, whose protagonist – V – dressed as Zorro, wears the mask of Guy Fawkes, the conspirator of the Gunpowder Plot (1605) who attempted to blow up the House of Lords¹⁴.

In a London devoted to tyranny, and to a repressive police state governed by the Norsefire Party, which punishes anyone who tries to violate orders or curfews, V is gifted with great and sudden eloquence, which he uses to harangues Londoners at unified networks and on the main squares of the City, using a

¹⁴ In his famous speech to his beloved London, V recalls it with these words, which express the full sense of the narrative and pervades the whole film: «More than four hundred years ago a great citizen wanted to impress November 5th forever in our memory. His hope, reminding the world that equity, justice, freedom are more than words, they are prospects. So if you haven't seen anything, if the crimes of this government remain unknown to you, I advise you to let November 5th pass unnoticed. But if you see what I see, if you think as I think and if you are looking, as I am, I ask you to join me, one year from tonight, outside the gates of parliament and together we will offer them a November 5th that will never be forgotten».

quote from *Hamlet*: «While the truncheon can replace dialogue, words will never lose their power, because they are the means to arrive at meaning and for those who want to listen to the affirmation of the truth. And the truth is that there is something terribly rotten in this country»¹⁵.

The mask, which covers his face disfigured by fire has become in contemporary society synonymous of rebellion and anti-oppressive beliefs at all latitudes of the world, in a substantially anarchic vision of power.



In search of evidence to nail down the tyrannical government, instead of the TNT, an emblematic phrase explodes: «It is

¹⁵ Spoken by Marcellus in Act I, scene IV (67), as he and Horatio debate whether or not to follow Hamlet and the ghost into the dark night.

something that concerns all governments: the most reliable documents are those of taxes. It seems that the original electronic records have been lost ... But I found this hard copy in a disused archives».

Particular mention should be made of Natalie Portman who, after the role of Padmé Amidala in *Attack of the Clones*, is at ease playing Evey Hammond, the female protagonist the whole story revolves around.

4.12 Das Leben der Anderen (2006) – The files of people

The same subject of the movie *La Caduta degli Dei* is at the heart of the most touching film about archives, *Das Leben der Anderen*, which won the Oscar as best foreign film, and which shows, especially in the emotional ending, the role of the archives as an instrument of power¹⁶.

The Ministry of Security of the German Democratic Republic (DDR), known as Stasi, entrusts Captain Gerd Wiesler, codenamed HGW XX / 7, to spy on Georg Dreyman, a committed intellectual, but certainly not socially dangerous.

¹⁶ LINDA GIUVA, STEFANO VITALI, ISABELLA ZANNI ROSIELLO, *Il potere degli archivi. Usi del passato e difesa dei diritti nella società contemporanea*, Milano, Mondadori, 2007 and CLAUDIO PAVONE, *Archivi e potere*, «Contemporanea», XII/I (2009), pp. 211-217, in «JSTOR», www.jstor.org/stable/24653117.

The operation is led by Minister Hempf, interested not so much in Dreyman's public life, but in framing him in order to be a candidate for the heart of Dreyman's partner, the charming actress Christa-Maria Sieland.

During the espionage, HGW XX / 7 has his first contact with literature, so far totally ignored by him. Indeed, develops – at a distance – a great deal of respect towards the man he is meant to frame and he begins to protect him, even hiding a typewriter that could have been proof of Dreyman's conspiratorial ideas, and doing so even at the cost of his career and his life.

Dreyman will only become aware of all this after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the Stasi Archives, in truly emotional scenes. After discovering the wires that hid the bugs in his house, distributed practically everywhere, he decides to go to the State Archives. While waiting in the consultation room, he is told: "Have a little more patience, there is more than one file regarding the investigation into you". For this reason, the Italian trailer of the movie has as its subtitle: *How many files tell your story?*

After delivering the numerous files on a trolley, the reading room officer gives him short instructions: «I have left the files in chronological order. The oldest are the ones on top, the most recent are the ones at the bottom», and the custodian, after placing the trolley near his table, upon leaving, reiterates «Pay attention!».



Leafing through files has the bitter taste of a journey back in time, until one discovers how much of our life is in the hands of totalitarian regimes, which use the archives as a deadly weapon against enemies.



Now the former Stasi spy earns his living with a modest job as a roadman, but the two men, on either side, do not have the courage to meet, even if they express gratitude to each other

from a distance. The first one for having saved him from prison, and the second for having nourished his life with the lymph of literature. So Dreyman decides to repay his debt and writes the book *Sonata for good men*. Wiesler sees it in the bookstore, attracted by the large photo of the author on the shop window. He enters, buys it and, intrigued, opening the first page, he reads: «Dedicated to HGW XX/7, with gratitude».

The ending is touching, exciting, poignant, similar to the magic of seeing one's life written on archival papers, while in the silence the protagonist feels his own soul, freed from the role of spy in a free Germany, shaking.

4.13 The proper distance (2007) – The archives of criminal trials

This movie, directed by Carlo Mazzacurati, describes the social interaction of a small community struggling with the killing of Mara. She played by Valentina Lodovini, was an independent, attractive and very desired woman in the village. She was loved by the young protagonist, Giovanni (played by Giovanni Capovilla), who does not believe in the guilt of the Tunisian mechanic, who will commit suicide in a prison while proclaiming his innocence.

As a journalist, Carlo begins an investigation by consulting the trial papers in the archives, with great passion, neglecting to maintain the “proper distance” that a professional must keep from the facts, as his editor-in-chief had recommended. Thus, he ends up discovering that the defense conducted by the Tunisian's

lawyer was embarrassingly incomplete, characterized by serious omissions that almost become real misdirections. In short, his was a defense more intent on covering up responsibilities than exonerating the accused.



Also in this movie, there are no noteworthy dialogues about archives and archivists, but the archives emerges as an instrument to guarantee justice. It is interesting to notice that, while searching for the requested file, the archivist makes a joke about the relationship between digital and traditional archives by saying, while slamming a particularly large file on the table in front of the user: «Negroponte said it thirty years ago, that because of the computer all the paper would have disappeared». The reference is to the American scientist Nicholas Negroponte, known above all for graphic interfaces and Computer Aided Design (CAD), here partially out of context. In any case, the journalist's investigation will find the culprit, thereby annoying the whole community that only wanted to forget the ugly crime surfaced on the historical record.

4.14 Il Divo. The spectacular life of Giulio Andreotti (2008) – The archives as an instrument of power

This movie tells the political and family history of Giulio Andreotti and takes its name from the epithet given to Andreotti by Mino Pecorelli, journalist of *Osservatore Politico*, killed by the mafia.

One of the known facts about Andreotti is that he kept a “large” archives which he used to defeat his opponents. Indeed, the he himself states it in the movie, with a phrase that will become famous: «Another thing I have: a large archives, since I don’t have much imagination».

A statement by his secretary deserves mention: while he discusses personal correspondence, he says: «There are love letters. You wouldn’t think so, but women liked Andreotti ... But I never showed them to him. There are things in life you shouldn’t see».



There are no archival dialogues in the movie neither archivists. However, it is the archives itself, both as a personal archives and as an aggregation of records of different origins, that appears in the various scenes, not as a background but as a protagonist and as an instrument of power, as in a sequence of shots where Andreotti slowly walks through the corridors along the shelves of his famous archives¹⁷.

4.15 **Män som hatar kvinnor (2009) – The unfinished disposal**

This movie is based on the first novel of the *Millennium* trilogy by a brilliant Stieg Larsson, published posthumously¹⁸.

The story unfolds through three characters, among which emerges a disturbing Lisbeth Salander, a bit hacker and a bit punk, whose life is marked by abuse and violence. In the end, her introverted character will be able to open up and collaborate with two other characters, Mikael Blomkvist and Henrik Vanger, in search of the culprit in the supposed death of the latter's niece,

¹⁷ Indro Montanelli also referred to archives as instrument of power, referring to the journalist Marco Travaglio, who had said in an interview in 2009: «That someone is surprised that a journalist has an archives, the backbone, is already unusual. I never understood how a journalist can work without an archives».

¹⁸ STIEG LARSSON, *Män som hatar kvinnor*, 2005, *Flickan som lekte med elden*, 2006, *Lufslottet som sprängdes*, 2007, all published in Italy by Marsilio in 2007. *Millennium* is the magazine, inspired by democratic principles, that investigates the scandals and opacity of the Swedish bourgeoisie and the former National Socialist circles.

which might have taken place forty years earlier. Based on an archival search, including documents not yet disposed of, Lisbeth will be able to find an accounting record that will nail the killer.



«Thanks to Henrik and his old-fashioned business principles, otherwise this stuff would have been shredded long ago». The mystery, therefore, is solved because of a document that had not been discarded, a decisive proof revealing the culprit. In this movie, differently from what happens in the *Attack of the Clones*, where we do not find what the archives should have kept, the archives reveal what shouldn't have been there.

5. Four short digressions

To close the circle on the perception of the archival profession, let's make four brief digressions, this time into the television world, which is equally full of references to the world of archives, unfortunately not always brilliant and welcoming ones.

5.1 Intelligence – Secret Services (2009)

Ana Caterina Morariu, played by Giada Lunardi, investigates, together with Marco Tancredi, played by Raul Bova, the disappearance of the latter's wife, Lidia Valenti, a psychiatrist who actually worked for the secret services. Lunardi decides to go to the underground, where are the secret service archives, to look for documents that can reveal some uncomfortable truths about Valenti.

Thanks to the dialogue between the investigator and the very detached and distracted archivist, a discrepancy emerges between the evidentiary capacity of the documents in analogue and those in digital form.



«There are some missing files in Lidia Valenti's dossier». «Impossible! If in doubt, check the paper archives». This is a very important sign of a possible misalignment, moving from

an hybrid archives to a promiscuous archives, not only in regard to the metadata and information contents but also document management procedures, diversified according to the context of creation or even the simple keeping of copies.

5.2 Diaco to Salvatori – Archivist, sewer rat (2009)

During an episode of *Uno Mattina Estate* in 2009, broadcast on RAI 1, the announcer Pierluigi Diaco, while introducing to the audience the music critic Dario Salvatori, used unacceptable expressions: «In my opinion, President Napolitano should make him a Knight of the Republic because he is the most ‘sewer rat archivist,’ ... as he can find everything...».



The editorial staff immediately noticed the gaffe and ran for cover, asking Diaco to rectify. However, the justification made the situation worse because, after the commercial break, Diaco stated: «I want to apologize to Dario Salvatori because, instead of saying archives mouse, I said sewer rat [...]. I wanted to emphasize the importance of Dario in the world of archives. I apologize».

No comment.

5.3 Forum (2010)

On September 18, 2010, broadcast on Rete 4, the telecast *Forum* showed a lawsuit by an employee against her employer.

The lawsuit was related to her desire to be reassigned to the archives, and leave her current job as the receptionist of the insurance agency, to which she had been assigned due to the resignation of the previous manager and because of her pleasant physical appearance.

She does not want work with the public, and the presenter, Rita Dalla Chiesa, commented: «Then you want an office rat job». The sliding banner of the subtitles reads: «Shy and not confident in her physical appearance, she does not want to work with the public».



In summing up the petition, Judge Flauti closed the hearing before retiring to deliberate by saying: «Up until a month ago, Francesca worked in complete autonomy, carrying out her work alone, in a small office. She asks to be reassigned to her old post as archivist [...] she thinks she is too introverted and shy for the other position».

The worker lost the case as the responsibilities and roles assigned to the staff are the exclusive responsibility of the employer, who has to respect the contractual framework with regard to all employment law profiles. No illegitimate action was identified on the basis of Articles 2086, 2094 and 2103 of the Italian Civil Code.

5.4 I soliti ignoti – Hidden Identities (2010)

In *I soliti ignoti* – Hidden Identities, the quiz show broadcast on RAI1 in prime time and conducted in the first edition (2007-2012) by Fabrizio Frizzi, we can find an important link to the first movie we examined. In the show, the contestant must guess the profession of various individuals by asking them questions. Among the professions to be discovered, in the episode of April 25, 2010, there is that of a person well known to Italian archivists, Concetta (Conny) Damiani, also for her commitment to the national archival association, ANAI.



Among the eight possible answers, some highly improbable jobs appear, such as survivor from the shipwreck of the *Andrea Doria* ship 1956!, The voice of Brad Pitt in Italian movies, and Miss Italia 1969 (if so, she would have been five years old at the time!). Despite some suggestions, because of the dazzling smile of the unknown person, the contestant unexpectedly chose the Miss Italia 1969 option, losing the then considerable amount of € 51,000.00.

The interesting issue regarding our study surfaced when Frizzi commented on the error, revealing that her profession was *archivist of the Chamber of Commerce*, showing also her photos.



The conductor said: «as Alberto Sordi would have said, Mr. Chief Archivist!», referring to the movie *Totò e i re di Roma* that was discussed earlier. Then he spoke to the audience, talking about Mrs. Damiani: «Even though she is in an archives, she smiles and is communicative. An open and communicative person can work in an archives». Again, the words are self-explanatory.

6. Conclusion

The figure of the archivist is often a caricature (*Totò e i re di Roma*), grumpy character, if not a person who hinders research (*Intelligence*, *The archivist*, *In the name of the father*), a person who holds the absolute truth (*Star Wars*), a useless dreamer (*Brazil*), a sucker (*Erin Brockovich*), a human larva (*Blade*), and so on.

Only in a few cases (*Fail-safe*, *Män som hatar kvinnor* and some others) the primary role of the archivist is that of protagonist in a public or private organization. But the level of respect rises when movie directors and screenwriters focus not on the archivist, but on the archives as a sacred place that preserves the documentary memory of its creator and guarantees accountability and citizens' rights.

In the movies examined in this paper, the protagonist is not the archivist but the archives, also thanks to the wonderful scenic effects, where the environment in the background becomes the protagonist of the story.

Gianni Penzo Doria, director of the State Archives of Venice and its School of Archival, Paleography and Diplomatics from 2019 to 2021, works at Insubria University as manager. He is Procurator of San Marco, member of the General Council of the Cini Foundation of Venice, member of the Strategic Council of the Italian Standardization Body – UNI, corresponding member of the Venetian Institute of Sciences, Letters and Arts and effective member of the Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie.

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