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Archivissima 27
Concept

It's All True? | È tutto vero?

8 p.m., October 30, 1938. Twenty-four-year-old Orson Welles unleashes panic across America. A news bulletin interrupts regular programming on CBS radio, announcing the landing of hostile extraterrestrials in Grovers Mill, a little-known town in New Jersey.

The War of the Worlds has begun. Or so thousands of radio listeners believe.

Despite warnings that the broadcast is fictional, few realize that what they are hearing is not a real event, but a radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, the science fiction novel written by H. G. Wells in 1897. Thousands of people panic and call the police. Even though it is all an elaborate hoax.

To this day, the broadcast remains among the most daring, sensational, and controversial radio programs in history. It resurfaces whenever we pause to consider the importance of sources, the trust we place in those who deliver a message, and what happens when we are unable to verify it.

In today's information ecosystem, a universe fueled by background noise and a cacophony of data, *fact, plausibility, and falsehood* coexist on seemingly equal footing, constantly blurring into one another, more or less consciously.

Distinguishing what is from what merely appears to be is a complex undertaking, and the solution certainly does not lie in quantity.

Writing in *Nature* about the long-standing mystery of the Loch Ness Monster - the world's last *object* neither photographed nor photographable, whose existence has inspired a staggering number of fabricated images ever since its supposed first sighting - journalist Daniel Cressey observed that "a lack of evidence rarely kills a story people want to believe."

Ultimately, what matters is trust. And trust is a relational process, not an informational one.

The authoritative guardians of sources, the natural custodians of our trust, are undoubtedly archives. Yet human history is full of documents, ideas, and artifacts that we have preserved in the belief that they were authentic, only to discover that this was not always the case: forgeries, master forgeries, copies, provisional or outdated truths.

The responsibility we entrust to archives when it comes to determining what is true and what is false is a question that concerns everyone involved in the preservation of cultural heritage.

Once, we turned to books and encyclopedias for answers. A few decades ago, we began looking for them on web browsers. And then, almost without realizing it, we found ourselves turning to AI for quick, often poorly verified answers.

Our relationship with the custodians of the sources on which we rely for knowledge has changed as well. The boundary between the world and its representation has become thinner than ever.

Is it all true, then?

This is the question Archivissima will explore in its 2027 edition.

Drawing inspiration not from one, but from two works that share the same title: *It's All True. È tutto vero?*

The first is the three-part documentary directed by Orson Welles in 1942. Filmed in Brazil to promote relations between the United States and Latin America during World War II, it was never completed and was only reassembled in 1993, after the discovery of the footage in the RKO archives.
Welles had also filmed aspects of Brazil that he had not been asked to document, including its darker and more troubling realities, turning the project into a work that was difficult to control and impossible to complete.

The second is the film Julien Temple made for the BBC in 1983, blending real and fictional footage to reflect on the advent of the "video age," the impact of television, and the changes technology was bringing to early-1980s society - anticipating anxieties that would later be amplified by the digital age.

Three times, across three different decades, the most widespread media of their time (radio, cinema, and television) prompted reflection on their own nature as vehicles for reproducing truth. Each sowed the doubt that falsehood can sometimes seem more real than reality itself, or that the truth can be difficult to believe.

Finding reliable answers is far from easy.
Raising questions, asking how and why, and investigating the roots of events is the only constructive path we can take to restore balance to the struggle between truth and falsehood, history and legend, information and propaganda.

We may find ourselves somewhere we never imagined reaching. But one thing is beyond doubt: where we must begin. With archives - the memory we all share, the centuries upon which we stand, always there to illuminate the way ahead.

Archivum semper certum est, Historia numquam.