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## Re-Imagining Archaeology

### I.

*“It is the analysis of silent births, or distant correspondences, of permanences that persist [...] of slow formations that profit from the innumerable blind complicities [...] Genesis, continuity, totalization: these are the themes of the history of ideas.*

*But archaeological description is precisely such an abandonment of the history of ideas, a systematic rejection of its postulates and procedures [...].” (Michel Foucault)<sup>1</sup>*

Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is defiant in distinguishing archaeology from other forms of historiography. Archaeology is “the systematic description of a discourse-object”<sup>2</sup>, it “tries to establish the system of transformations that constitute change”<sup>3</sup>, it “does not have a unifying, but a diversifying effect”<sup>4</sup>, it “is not supposed to carry any suggestion of anticipation”<sup>5</sup>. As such, archaeology is not a substitute for “the history of ideas”, not a proxy for iconography, not an alternative for eccentric discovery or collecting, not a surrogate for rigorous research. With this in mind it seems imperative to delineate an approach to “media archaeology” that, on the one hand, avoids idiosyncrasies or subjectivities, and, on the other, doesn’t lull itself into isolating media history as a specialized discipline insulated from its discursive historical role.

There’s little doubt that the multi-threaded developments of media have numerous unresolved histories and that an enormous task of retrieval and conceptualisation has yet to be achieved. How a media archaeology can constitute itself against self-legitimation or reflexivity is crucial if it is to circumvent the reinvention of “unifying”, progressive, “cyclical”, or “anticipatory” history – even as it is challenged to constitute these very yet vague histories as an antidote to the gaping lapses in traditional historiography. Indeed, it is this very problem

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<sup>1</sup> *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.