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Streaming Heritage – Towards a Media Archaeology of the Web

By and large media and communication studies tend to focus contemporary issues. As a consequence the media history of the web – or 'the digital' – remains somewhat scholarly neglected. The concept of media archaeology has during the last decade emerged as one way of addressing the history of media without the limitations of teleological linearities. Media archaeology is both a theoretical (and epistemological) concept, with an emphasis on the way media shape our understanding of the everyday (now and then), as well as a method where old – and sometimes even dead – media is dug up from the past.

So what can a media archaeology of the web tell us? Well, first of all that we are rapidly losing our ability to reconstruct the digital past – we are indeed living in an era of *bit rot*. In fact, digital archiving poses fundamental challenges for media studies and the memory sector, especially when it comes to web preservation. Hundreds of years ago archives and libraries were set up in order to foster research and prevent societies from losing their memory. But the digital domain is not an archive, nor is it a library. Vast amounts of data are of course kept online, but there is simply no guarantee that computers of tomorrow will be able to read or understand current data and file formats. As a consequence, web archiving has developed into *one* preservational strategy to deal with the contemporary loss of digital information.

My talk will partly address web archiving and the way it severely reduces the medium of the web into a succession of static screenshots – and what the consequences for media studies might be. Yet, I will foremost focus a kindred new research project (funded by the Swedish Research Council) on streaming heritage. The purpose of the so called "Spotify-project" is both web historical and contemporary. On the one hand it will track the development of online music cultures, from file sharing at Napster and The Pirate Bay to legal streaming services as Spotify. On the other hand it will follow files in digital music distribution by way of digital ethnographic methods. Research will, in short, be conducted and based on the creation of a non-profit, digital record label in order to study unexpected file 'behavior', aggregation platform strategies, processes of (de)valuation, and infrastructures that make these possible.