# A Manifesto for Design Archeology

The practice of design is future oriented, designers make propositions that help to imagine, experience and research new futures [1, 3, 6, 10, 12, 13]. But design can also learn from its past and use this knowledge that is embedded in the past to inform and shape new practices of creating futures [6]. The practice of *archeology of the contemporary past* [2, 5, 8] is a powerful tool to study the most recent past that still impacts our everyday lives. By taking an approach that builds upon this practice, designers can gain new insights in their design practice from analyzing the material remains of past projects [14]. This *Design Archeology* can help navigate the complex 'now' through uncovering the hidden past and shed light on a multitude of possible, plausible, and preferrable futures [7].

## 1. The past is ambiguous

Embracing ambiguity in observing the past can lead to the integration of many perspectives in the observations of the past. Using ambiguity can guide towards perspectives that used to be overlooked in more coherent and straightforward historical accounts. The design process is ambiguous and not linear, there are always explorations that turned out to be a dead end. But these dead ends hold valuable information. This information that can be useful to recall and might inspire a change in present and future practice.

## 2. Centralize the physical remains

To talk about the past, one needs to make it physical. Researching the past without its material traces is difficult. The re-engagement with the material remains of projects helps to prompt memories and allows for tacit knowledge decisions to become visible again [9, 11, 16]. The memories are embedded in the material aspects of the design and the intended interactions [17]. Design can draw attention to the overlooked aspects of the objects and environment to encourage reflection on their significance [4]. In this way Design Archeology can also help in analysing the past and its environmental remains, and through this trigger reflection on how the past influences the present and the future.

## 3. Go back from the start

A point in time is needed to start investigating a project and its material remains. The official start date of a project allows for this exploration since it is a clear point in time, that can often be defined as a "*day/month/year*". Picking such a specific point allows for two interesting questions to be asked; "*why is this seen as the starting point?*" and "*what lead up to this point in time?*". These questions help with opening up new perspectives and can uncover the underlying values and assumptions that influenced the project.

## 4. Relate to the present

To quote Shakespeare: "what's past is prologue" [15], when past knowledge is "dug" up it is important to relate it to present day practice. How has this informed current practice and why was this information ignored or used to inform current practice. By relating it to the present bias can be uncovered and points of change can be identified.

## 5. Translate to the future

These points of change are where we can start from when looking at the future. The different perspectives in the present, originating from trajectories in the past uncover many potential futures and can highlight what is preferable for whom, for what, and what scale of future vision [6]. Translating the excavated knowledge from the past, through the present, to the future provides opportunities to discover what transformation in practice is needed to imagine, research and prototype new futures.

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This manifesto is part of the Design ___ Archeology Research Kit