When conducting archival research, scholars interested in old media frequently encounter devices that no longer work or exist only as illustrations, fictions, or one-offs. Even when component parts or photographs are available, it is incredibly difficult to determine how this became that in a particular moment. Indeed, absences always persist. Rather than studying such uncertainty at a remove, I detail methods for prototyping absences in the historical record, with implications for thinking about materials and meaning across disciplines. Based on laboratory research conducted at the University of Victoria, I draw from three examples of remaking old media---wearable technologies from the 1860s, magnetic recording devices from the 1890s, and various optophones from the twentieth century---to demonstrate how prototyping the past affords unique approaches to examining the contingent relations between then and now.