

Steve Jobs on Why Computers Are Like a Bicycle for the Mind (1990)

by **Maria Popova**

A 20-year-old antidote to modern-day digital pessimism.

The future of libraries — and of information, curiosity, and knowledge at large, of which the library has always been a bastion — is something I think about a lot, particularly the struggles of intellectual institutions like libraries and museums in bringing their vast analog archives into the [digital sphere](#) in an intelligent and useful way. In this excerpt from the film *Memory & Imagination: New Pathways to the Library of Congress*, essentially an extended 1990 infomercial for [The Library of Congress](#) starring such icons as **Francis Ford Coppola**, **Julia Child**, **Penn & Teller**, and **Gore Vidal**, **Steve Jobs** talks about the future of libraries in the digital age, video games as simulated learning environments, and why a computer is like a bicycle for the mind — a metaphor that I, as a bike lover, a curiosity jockey, and a techno-optimist, want to shake in the face of every [false prophet pedaling techno-dystopia](#).



I think one of the things that really separates us from the high primates is that we're tool builders. I read a study that measured the efficiency of locomotion for various species on the planet. The condor used the least energy to move a kilometer. And, humans came in with a rather unimpressive showing, about a third of the way down the list. It was not too proud a showing for the crown of creation. So, that didn't look so good. But, then somebody at Scientific American had the insight to test the efficiency of locomotion for a man on a bicycle. And, a man on a bicycle, a human on a bicycle, blew the condor away, completely off the top of the charts.

And that's what a computer is to me. What a computer is to me is it's the most remarkable tool that we've ever come up with, and it's the equivalent of a bicycle for our minds." ~ **Steve Jobs**

For a related treat, don't miss this recently uncovered [1995 interview](#), in which Steve Jobs opens the door to his philosophy on life and failure.

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