

HOW TO TURN A BICYCLE INTO A RECORD PLAYER

A Seven-Step Guide by Andrew Ritchey and Josh Guilford
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Imagine the sound that a bicycle would make were it not a bicycle at all but a record player. Would it make any sound we could imagine, or would it make just those sounds we already associate with the phonograph? Music and speech both come to mind; they are often recorded. Perhaps we imagine hearing the rasping lisps of the needle on the record itself.

Then again, we may imagine that our record player isn't really the thing we thought it was at the outset! Perhaps it sounds differently. What really does a record player sound like? Could it sound something like a bicycle? And if not something like a bicycle, is it then nothing like it? Couldn't they be always, already, something like the same thing?

This sequence of films will show you, step by step, how to turn a bicycle into a record player. That metaphor of turning is, of course, something both bicycle and record player have literally in common. If in the course of this program you don't feel the one turning into the other, just think of the bicycle—or record player—and you'll understand immediately how one thing becomes another.

Step 1: **The Yodeling Lesson (Vanessa Renwick, 1998, 3 min)**
“NO HANDS! NO BRAKES! NO CLOTHES!” -VR

Step 2: **Thinktank 6: How to Turn a Bicycle into a Record Player (Mark Dixon and Chris Huggins, 2001, 12 min)**
“The scene is an abandoned office space. First we loaded the room up with tools, food, water and the ole five gallon bucket. We also had a bicycle and a dozen records. At the word go we gave ourselves an hour to search through the rest of the abandoned office space for other useful materials then the door was shut and sealed for the duration. It took us 41.5 hours to play our first record. This video consists of 12768 still photos displayed as a time lapse. At the end the video slows down to real time so you can hear the first successful song, a Disney joint about learning to tell time. Time is tricky. We're still learning.” -Thinktank

Step 3: **studio.time.isolation: reconstructions of soul and the sublime (Tony Cokes, 2011, 9.5 min)**
“My developing research interrogates what happens in the artist's studio, how those practices are represented, and why traditional images persist in a conceptual, virtual contemporary landscape. This video deploys an excerpt from Tom Holert's essay 'Studio Time,' which discusses 'Western Recording,' a film installation by Mathias Poledna. The video presents an edited, re-sequenced version of Holert's text to reframe key themes related to my earlier print project 'Supplement'... The video operates via a strategic detour from a specific visual, white, discursive realm (Los Angeles pop) into a different virtual, black, sound context (Kingston, Jamaica's reggae). However, by removing the specific references to Poledna's work, I enable Holert's argument to function more broadly as a close comparison and differentiation of the artist's studio with sites of musical, filmic, and televisual production. My redeployment of Holert's text seeks to underline the symmetries and contradictions between diverse 'studio' practices, technological isolation, mediated and performed temporality, their subjective effects, and mass distribution.” -TC

- Step 4: Fluorescent/Azalea (Andrea Callard, 1976, 3 min)**
“Between City Hall Park and the Hudson River, I photographed lights and reflections visible from places where other people worked. There were flowers that were nearly fluorescent for sale at the Farm & Garden Nursery and to see at the Botanic Gardens. Earlier in life, both singing onstage and diving boards were platforms for performance.” -AC
- Step 5: Lost Shoe Blues (Andrea Callard, 1976, 4 min)**
“In *Lost Shoe Blues*, the camera walks looking over weeds growing in landfill sand dumped to extend the edges of Battery Park City. We hear a song about losing shoes and losing time as nature forces persist. At this time in New York City, there actually were lost landscapes strewn with single cast off shoes, weeds, and other bits of life.” -AC
- Step 6: Flora Funera (for Battery Park City) (Andrea Callard, 1976, 4 min)**
“West of the World Trade Center was an open field edged by a retaining wall. On Memorial Day, 1976, I made this by throwing rocks at the rebar with Bernice Rubin and Richard Friedman.” -AC
- Step 7: The Discovery of the Phonograph (Stuart Sherman, 1986, 6 min)**
“Sherman’s films are not slices of reality. His camera does not give us the sense that it is gliding over an endless continuum, recording objects and events that are everywhere and connected to more off-screen data. Rather, he returns to an earlier idea of cinema, composing pictures that suggest the proscenium arch of the theatre... calling attention to their own artifice. Like the Surrealists, with whom he shares both themes and methods, Sherman tampers with the ordinary in order to produce the marvelous.” - Sally Banes

Estimated Time: 42 min

So the bicycle turned out to be the record player all along? When that big title card came up—THE END—and the credits started turning, I worked backwards from the “D,” retracing all the curves the hero took, and the angles that she hit. There was the resolution, the chase, the moment it all went wrong. Before that was the setup, and before that was the calm. I could see the shape of it shift in my mind, with the turntable turning upright, the record grooves morphing into treads, horn collapsing and branching into frame.

I stepped on and rode home, winding along the streets and around corners, retracing my route to the show. I watched as the trees and houses appeared in sequence, but with the meaning all different when replayed in reverse. The route seemed to be less about the trees and houses than the relationship between this house and that tree. I could see that each street was alone and in itself, but also tied to others by roundabouts and intersections. I started wondering what it would mean to navigate not by roads but by intersections, to value these as points of exchange and indeterminacy. The in-between moment when the turntable hadn’t yet turned into the wheel, hovering at an angle, half-velvet, half-rubber.

I remembered then a movie where a man found a record player in an intersection, with a woman’s voice that sang about “wonderful schemes from nowhere.” I turned it over in my head, trying to recall the way they got from the nowhere-woman to the intersection, and from the intersection to the man. But when I put the record down to play the other side, the music seemed subdued, with the voices hard to hear beneath the lisp of the needle.