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Cyclisme Communard

CORRY CROPPER AND DARYL LEE

Inspired by a 1901 article in *La Presse* titled “Cyclisme Communard,” we explore the significance of the velocipede and its cultural and historical connections to the Commune. The embodiment of freedom and mobility before the war, the velocipede came to be seen as out of place during the siege when riding could be considered an informal act of treason. We argue that the many journalistic, literary, and artistic representations of the velocipede mirror the cultural shifts brought about by the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune: from the enthusiasm of the late 1860s, to the fear at the beginning of the war, the despair of the siege, the sorrow during the aftermath, and the hope of a slow “rebirth.”

In early 1901, *La Presse* ran a story in its regular “Vie sportive” section titled simply, “Cyclisme Communard.” In the article, Gustave de Lafreté reviews a forthcoming history of the Ministry of War during the Commune penned by General Jules Bourelly (who, as a young captain at the siege of Metz in 1870, had been captured by the Prussians). Lafreté expresses surprise at Bourelly’s assertion that Louis Rossel, the only French regular army officer to take a role in the Commune’s military leadership, had sought to organize a company of National Guardsmen on velocipedes in order to conduct reconnaissance and act as couriers. Lafreté suggests that, were it true, this episode would be important for the history of cycling and, more broadly, for the history of sport. However, given the weight and construction of velocipedes in 1871, Lafreté has his doubts about the veracity of the story and hopes that someone will one day write “une communication plus complète et plus détaillée sur la curieuse tentative de Rossel” (3). In this article, we examine the plausibility of Bourelly’s assertion. But a study of the velocipede during the siege of Paris and the Commune has significance beyond the history of sport. Indeed, an analysis of the velocipede and its relationship to the siege and the Commune plunges us into the heart of what this period represented to

contemporary Parisians. It provides a lesson in contrasts between the euphoria of *velocipedomania* in the late 1860s and the stultifying constraint of the siege and the violence of the Commune. Once the embodiment of freedom and mobility before the war, the velocipede came to be seen as out of place during the siege when riding could be considered an informal act of treason. As cannon wheels replaced velocipede wheels, as stagnancy replaced mobility, and as the horse was once again preferred to the two-wheeled mount, the élan inspired by Pierre Michaux's invention largely died out.¹ The velocipede can be viewed as a symbol that reveals the cultural shifts brought about by the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune: the enthusiasm of the late 1860s, the fear at the beginning of the war, the despair of the siege, the sorrow during the aftermath, and the hope of a slow "rebirth."

Commonly called a "boneshaker" by English-speaking practitioners, the velocipede was an iron-framed, wooden-wheeled machine. Pierre Michaux, who began manufacturing velocipedes in the early 1860s, engineered pedals directly into the front axle, invented a brake for the rear wheel, and built a frame that provided a small amount of shock absorption. By 1870, there were more than forty velocipede clubs in France (Burr 67–68). Most importantly, the velocipede became synonymous with French culture; as journalist Charles Yriarte maintained in June 1869: "Le vélocipède est dans les mœurs, il est passé dans le sang, il s'élève à la hauteur d'une institution. [. . .] Le vélocipède devait naître; aujourd'hui il est conséquent avec notre temps, avec nos mœurs; il ne pouvait ne pas être" (402). The velocipede very quickly emerged as a marker of everyday modernity and of French national identity. In February 1868, Léon Bienvenu, writing in the weekly paper *L'Éclipse*, proclaimed:

Un vrai signe des temps, c'est le vélocipède. Cet outil a été cette année en grande fureur; et je crois que l'engouement n'est que le prélude d'une ère nouvelle. [. . .] Je crois que le vélocipède est appelé à rendre d'énormes services lorsqu'il sera passé dans nos mœurs. Chaque citoyen aura son vélocipède accroché à un clou dans son antichambre et lorsqu'il voudra sortir, il le décrochera en même temps que son chapeau et son pardessus. (3)

In early 1869, the weekly paper *La Chanson illustrée* published these lyrics by Alexandre Flan to a song titled "Les Vélocipèdes":

Un véhicule à la mode partout
Et qu'il nous faut chanter, pour être en règle
Avec la mode, avec le nouveau goût,
D'une façon joyeuse autant qu'espigle:
C'est ce dada qu'on rencontre à tout coup,
C'est cette fièvre encore sans remède;

Or ça chantons, de peur de faire un loup,
 Le fin vélo (*bis*), le fin vélocipède!
 [. . .]
 Or, aujourd'hui, son règne est arrivé:
 Au Luxembourg, comme au bois de Boulogne,
 Collégien, artisan ou crevé,
 Sur un *bicycle* à cheval, sans vergogne,
 Vifs comme un trait, vont dévorant le sol.
 [. . .]
 Mais le vélo fait florès, à ce point
 Que des facteurs la race se récrie,
 La poste en veut! . . . Et ne parle-t-on point
 D'en remonter notre cavalerie?
 On dit encore, et l'incident est neuf,
 Que Henri IV en raffole et qu'il plaide
 Pour remplacer son cheval du Pont-Neuf
 Par un vélo (*bis*), par un vélocipède! (2)

These lyrics point to the passion the velocipede inspired across social classes, humorously embedding it into the French historical narrative while underscoring its practical uses (for both the postal service and the military). Significantly, the song posits that the horse, the great symbol of military strength, be replaced by the velocipede, a symbol of liberty, innovation, and transgression—the velocipede allowed women to travel and dress freely, it democratized travel, and it came to embody the carnivalesque. Flan suggests that this shift should symbolically take shape in the center of Paris by transforming the equestrian statue of Henri IV—a king who had besieged Paris for nearly four months in 1590—into a statue of him astride a velocipede.

In early 1868, Le Baron de la Rue became the first person to write extensively about the velocipede's practical uses in his *Note sur le vélocipède à pédales et à frein de M. Michaux*. A bureaucrat at the Ministry of the Navy, de la Rue was described in *Le Figaro* as a “médiocre travailleur,” unable to focus on the task at hand: “La vélocipédomanie occupait tous ses instants, paralysait toutes les ressources de son intelligence” (Coulanges 1). Indeed, de la Rue wrote the *Note sur le vélocipède* to suggest practical connections between the velocipede and state-run services (mail delivery, telegraph delivery, medical rescues, etc.) but primarily, it seems, to justify the long rides that took him away from his office in the ministry. The siege of Paris provided a way for this velocipede-crazed *fonctionnaire* to climb the ranks of public administration despite his incompetence:

Au commencement du siège, ce vélocipédiste enragé s'est offert comme secrétaire à l'amiral Fleuriot de Langle, du 6^e secteur, et l'amiral a accepté

ses services. Capitaine d'état-major d'emblée, décoré quatre mois plus tard, sans pour cela avoir été plus héroïque qu'un autre, M. de la Rue, bien élevé, du reste, et d'une honorable famille, n'a eu qu'un mot à dire pour se faire nommer sous-préfet de Saint-Malo par M. Picard. [. . .] Dans son arrondissement, on l'appelle le sous-préfet au vélocipède. (Coulanges 1)

Though he likely transferred out of Paris long before the insurrection, his text about the velocipede nevertheless made an impact during the Commune. In his *Note*, de la Rue wrote: "Le vélocipède serait précieux à un corps d'infanterie détaché dans un poste, un fort, etc., pour les communications avec le centre du commandement militaire, pour les reconnaissances, etc." (9).

De la Rue's idea of using the velocipede in the service of the military was taken up again somewhat ironically in *Le Manuel du vélocipède*, a sprawling 1869 work compiled by Le Grand Jacques (pseudonym of Richard Lesclide) that reflected the essence of the 1869 velocipede craze and that situated this new machine in the long cultural history of France. In a chapter on politics and war, Le Grand Jacques imagines an island where horses die within a week of arriving due to a strain of pertussis. This island's emperor learns that in Paris "une sorte de Prométhée" constructs "des chevaux de bois et de fer" that his enemies, the Liffre-Loffres, plan to use to attack him and defeat his empire (Le Grand Jacques 55–56). Thanks to his wise vizier, however, he is able to steal his enemy's velocipedes and retain his empire. In a tongue-in-cheek way, this story points to the potential use of velocipedes should a cavalry find itself lacking horses.

As the war with Prussia began, Le Grand Jacques's writing became very practical, exploring the idea of using velocipedes to facilitate communication in Paris should the war reach the city. In his newspaper, *Le Vélocipède illustré*, he published an article titled "Projet d'estafettes à bicycle dans l'intérieur de Paris," noting that the velocipede could travel more quickly than trains around the perimeter of the city and that it was more agile and swift than a coach inside the city [*bicycle* here means a two-wheeled—rather than a three-wheeled—velocipede; an *estafette* is a mounted courier]. In this thinking, the velocipede would have much greater flexibility than trains or omnibuses; rather than preset itineraries, it could go where the rider needed, adjusting routes rather than following a track and taking narrower streets rather than larger avenues, all while navigating the crowded sectors of the capital:

Il est donc évident que la question de rapidité est résolue, et que les Bicycles peuvent revendiquer le rôle d'estafettes, si—ce qu'à Dieu ne plaise!— nous avons la douleur de voir l'étranger sous les murs de Paris. D'un point central, un Véloceman peut arriver en un quart d'heure à toutes les barrières; il peut traverser la ville en une demi-heure environ. Il file à

travers les groupes et les embarras de voitures; il peut suppléer au manque de chevaux, et même les remplacer absolument. (“Projet d’estafettes” 1)

Le Grand Jacques, prophet of the velocipede, here foresees the siege of Paris and the shortage of horses that eventually plagued the military organization of the Commune. He notes that the velocipede’s nimbleness and speed could help overcome the stasis of a siege.

During the Commune, then, the idea of using velocipedes was already in the air. It should not, therefore, have been a surprise when Rossel proposed using them—as de la Rue had suggested—to communicate with headquarters and to conduct reconnaissance. Here is how General Bourelly, in his 1901 history of the Commune, described the moment:

Tout en faisant les préparatifs de défense intérieure nécessaires pour éviter une surprise, Rossel continuait à s’occuper de l’organisation des troupes des différentes armes. [. . .] Le 8 [mai 1871] Rossel annonçait aux membres du Comité central son intention de se servir de vélocipèdes bicycles, pour monter des estafettes, et les invitait à désigner l’un d’entre eux pour organiser ce nouveau service. (846)

Rossel’s attempts at organizing and professionalizing the National Guard troops were frequently met with apathy by the soldiers and undermined by his opponents in the Commune’s *comité de salut public*. But this opposition did not change his need to better communicate with the various strongholds outside the city, most notably the Fort d’Issy, which fell to French government troops the very evening Rossel gave the order to organize a company of velocipedists. Sadly, the loss of Issy led to Rossel’s resignation on 9 May. Ironically for a man proposing the adoption of velocipedes, while visiting Issy earlier in May, Rossel had fallen from his horse and sustained injuries that later prevented him from escaping Paris at the end of the Commune. He was consequently executed in November 1871 at the age of 27. If only he had been on a velocipede!²

In his discussion of Bourelly’s claim, Lafreté challenges the idea that such an event could have taken place. “Je ne vois pas très bien les estafettes militaires parcourant les voies sur les machines encore très rudimentaires de l’époque. Ces hommes ne devaient guère aller plus vite qu’à pied [. . .] car ces vélocipèdes pesaient alors dans les trente-cinq kilos et étaient deux fois plus volumineux que la moderne bicyclette” (3). Lafreté exaggerates the size and weight of a velocipede: according to the *Manuel du vélocipède*, these forerunners to the bicycle could weigh as little as 20 kilos and they were not much larger than bicycles in the 1900s (105). And even on rough roads, velocipedes could go much faster than a soldier on foot, averaging close to ten miles per hour.

Despite Lafreté's skepticism, it seems that Rossel did indeed issue an order to organize soldiers on velocipedes. The following passage from Bourelly's account explains the rationale for turning to velocipedes:

[Rossel] cherchait alors à former quelques escadrons de cavalerie. Pour remédier au manque de chevaux [. . .] il ne vit rien de mieux que de s'entendre avec les Allemands à Saint-Denis, ainsi qu'en fait foi la lettre suivante envoyée le 3 mai à Jourde, délégué aux Finances: "J'ai l'honneur de vous informer que je viens d'acheter aux Prussiens mille chevaux au prix de 400 francs. Dans deux jours, probablement, nous aurons à payer tout ou partie de ces dépenses."

La teneur de cet avis semble indiquer qu'il existait, dès lors, un traité en règle entre les deux parties, sinon qu'il y avait au moins accord entre elles. D'un autre côté des essais qui eurent lieu peu après pour la formation de vélocipédistes militaires, tiendraient à prouver que cette convention ne fut pas suivie d'exécution. Dans tous les cas, s'il y a eu rupture du marché, on ne saurait dire à quelle partie il faut l'imputer et quel en été le motif. (839–40)

At 400 francs per horse, it is easy to understand why velocipedes became an appealing option to Rossel. Though the most expensive velocipedes sold for the same amount (400 francs) in 1869, there would have been many two-wheelers already at hand in the city and, as the velocipede's promoters were fond of claiming, they never bolted, could be stored "dans un coin," and never required costly feed (Le Grand Jacques 111). Further complicating matters for Rossel, on 6 May, the leadership of the Commune had ruled that the few horses still in Paris could not be taken outside the city (Bourelly 846). Hence, the need for an alternate means of transportation became increasingly acute.

Le Grand Jacques suspended publication of his newspaper at the start of the siege. When he began publishing it again on 16 July 1871 (under the new title *La Vitesse*), he reported the following:

Les Bureaux du *Vélocipède illustré* ont reçu plusieurs fois la visite, pendant le siège de Paris, des gens désireux d'organiser des Compagnies franches de Vélocipédistes, pour servir à la guerre nationale. [. . .] Mais ce n'est pas au dernier moment qu'on peut créer des Compagnies pareilles dans de bonnes conditions. — Espérons que l'avenir sera plus prévoyant. [. . .] Quelques essais individuels ont été faits dans un sens pratique, et, à défaut de Compagnies, nous avons vu des estafettes parcourir Paris à Véloce pendant le siège. Il faut reconnaître toutefois qu'on les voyait avec une certaine inquiétude. L'esprit de la population, devenu plus sérieux, s'obstinait à considérer l'exercice du Véloce comme un amusement. Tant il est vrai que

les choses de l'utilité la plus évidente sont les plus difficiles à s'imposer aux habitudes de la foule. ("Faits Divers" 3)

Le Grand Jacques's report lends credence to Bourelly's assertion that orders were given to use velocipedes during the Commune: even if a company was never organized, couriers nevertheless traveled through Paris during the siege. In his work on the Paris Commune, *Das rothe Quartal* [*The Red Quarter*], the German writer Johannes Scherr corroborates Le Grand Jacques's claim: "Gentlemen from city hall let their messengers run through the various quarters, and since there is a lack of horses for the aides, you can see and hear Garibaldians in tight-fitting clothes whiz through the streets on Velocipedes" (99).

But Le Grand Jacques's report sounds a melancholic note, remarking that the velocipede struck Parisians as entirely incompatible with life under the siege. This is undoubtedly because before the war the velocipede had been seen as a hopeful invention linked with freedom of movement, upward mobility, gender equality, and the carnivalesque.³ Le Grand Jacques himself, in his *Manuel du vélocipède*, had coded the velocipede as transgressive, liberating, and erotic. A four-part series—"Journal d'un véloceman pendant le siège de Paris" by Charles D . . . penned in the early days of the war but published in Le Grand Jacques's newspaper *La Vitesse*—underscores the clash between the ethos of the velocipede and the somber mood of the siege: "La promenade que j'ai faite ce matin m'a troublé. La foule ne comprend plus le bicycle. Les gens me jetaient des regards irrités, comme si j'insultais aux malheurs de la patrie. Un imbécile m'a même appelé Prussien. C'est insensé. J'enraie" (23 July 1871). After the defeat at Sedan and the invasion, riding a velocipede in Paris no longer made sense. In fact, since the velocipede was so connected to fun and frivolity, riding represented a sort of treason, a denial of the tragedy that was unfolding and would soon come upon the city.

After cleaning and storing his velocipede, the author of the "Journal d'un véloceman pendant le siège" describes walking through Paris in the fall of 1870: "Je n'ai pas vu un bicycle de la journée, quoique j'aie flâné quelques heures aux Champs-Élysées. Que va dire le Grand Jacques? Mais il ne dira rien, puisque son journal ne paraît plus. [. . .] Mon Dieu! que nous sommes loin des courses de Vélocipèdes!" (23 July 1871). In another installment, the velocipedist laments: "On se bat du côté de Villejuif et de Châtillon. Le fil télégraphique de l'Ouest vient d'être coupé; c'est le seul qui nous unissait encore aux départements. Nous sommes désormais au secret" (30 July 1871). The velocipede had allowed for quicker transportation, more communication, and faster, more reliable delivery of news before the war; now that the siege was underway, newspapers stopped circulation and communication with the world outside of Paris was cut off. The velocipede, the great symbol of freedom and communication in the late 1860s,



Ce genre d'exercice devient de plus en plus en faveur : j'enlève, tu enlèves, il ou elle enlève, etc.
— Vous voyez bien que le printemps s'avance!

Fig. 1. Bavarian State Library Munich, *Paris Caprice*, 1869, p. 207, urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10498606-5.

struggled for acceptance in the confined, suffocating world of the siege and the Commune.

The illustrator and author Albert Robida offers what may be the most dramatic visual representations of the shifting attitudes toward the velocipede due to the changing political landscape in France. In a sketch for *Paris-Caprice* in 1869, “La Saison des enlèvements” (Figure 1), Robida depicts men abducting women, women abducting men, and the ways in which new technologies (including the montgolfière) freed Parisians from constraints, led them out of the city into nature, and allowed them to embrace frivolity, playfulness, and each other.

Robida had found quick success in the satirical press of Paris in the late 1860s as a newly arrived young illustrator from Compiègne. In the midst of taking in the hustle and bustle of Second Empire Paris, the backdrop for “La Saison des enlèvements,” he began imagining new technologies and practices of war that would punctuate his futuristic work for the rest of his career, with three separate projects having the title *La Guerre au Vingtième Siècle*.⁴ The first of these, undertaken in 1869 and 1870, was titled “La Guerre au 20^e siècle – Campagne de

Jujubie.”⁵ Just months before the actual declaration of the Franco-Prussian War, Robida dreamed up a horrific scene of carnage and chemical warfare. The king of the imaginary kingdom of Jujubie defends his capital, Jujubewitz, against a rival’s brutal siege (Figure 2).⁶ In this battle, preprogrammed steam engines continue to operate even after all humans are killed—except for a few hardy souls who take flight at the last minute “grâce à leur vélocipède” (qtd. in Viche 113). Though velocipedes save the lives of some, they also figure prominently in the sketch as weapons in this futuristic war.

Through the late summer, fall, and early winter of 1870–71, Robida’s fanciful repurposing of velocipedes into military machines gave way to the brutal reality of the actual warfare he witnessed. Though not militaristic—and perhaps even antiwar—Robida enlisted in the Garde nationale (74th Battalion, 6th company) and served as secretary for the XX^e arrondissement (under Gambetta). With this position came a laissez-passer that allowed him to circulate in Paris and beyond the fortifications, where he sketched scenes of life under the siege and the Commune.⁷ In the visual chronicle he made during this period, the velocipede wheels that symbolized liberty and pleasure in 1869 were entirely replaced by cannon wheels or by detached or disembodied wheels that formed parts of the barricades and ruins around the city.⁸ The shift from velocipede wheels to cannon wheels in Robida’s imagery parallels the shift from the effervescent liberty of 1869 to the stultifying repression of 1871.

Robida’s use of the velocipede underscores the double-edged nature of the mechanical age. On the one hand, velocipedes carry people away from the city toward romantic seclusion in the “Saison des enlèvements” or, in the narrative of the *Campagne de Jujubie*, they allow a lucky few to flee and avoid destruction. On the other hand, velocipedes are imagined as part of a mechanized army that moves toward the city, surrounding, confining, and attacking its inhabitants. The hot-air balloon, too, appears in both Robida sketches, but rather than a whimsical amusement blown harmlessly by the wind (Figure 1), it becomes a mechanized engine of war (Figure 2). Technology, it seems, can lead to pastoral idealism and love, but it can also lead to more efficient weaponry, the toppling of cultural patrimony, and death.

By August 1871, Le Grand Jacques had begun taking stock of the consequences of the siege.

Informations. — Il ne faut pas croire que *La Vitesse* ait facilement repris possession de la clientèle laborieusement formée par l’ancien *Vélocipède illustré*. La guerre a malheureusement passé par là. La nature même de notre journal nous a fait une situation plus difficile que celle de nos confrères. Nous ne comptons guère pour lecteurs et pour abonnés que des jeunes gens hardis, qui ont endossé l’uniforme au premier appel de la Patrie.

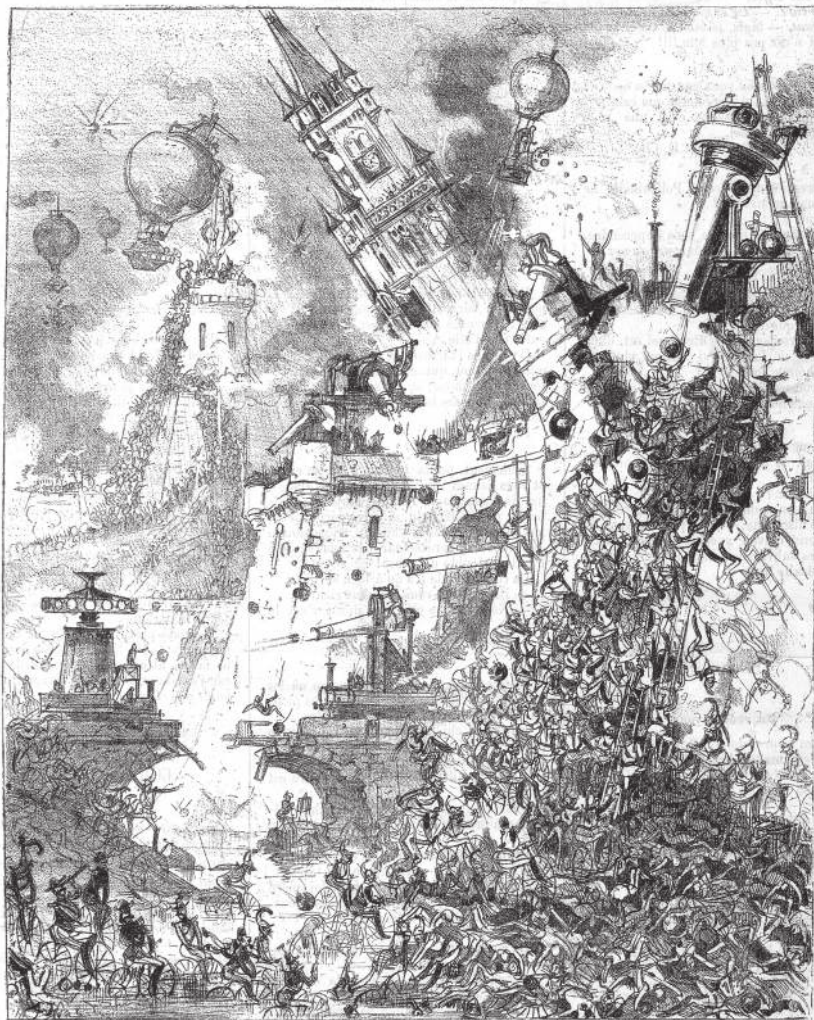


Fig. 2. "La Guerre au vingtième siècle," *La Charge* 15 May 1870 (4), BnF ; also published in the album *Campagne de Jujubie*.

Les moindres ont défendu nos remparts et mangé le pain gris du siège. Nous nous en apercevons cruellement. — Il nous est revenu, pendant ces premières semaines, un certain nombre de numéros, avec cette annotation: MORT, à côté de l'adresse. — À ces amis perdus, tous nos regrets.

Un plus grand nombre de journaux nous revient avec ces mots: *Inconnu*, — *Parti sans adresse*, — *Absent*. . . . Cela donne une idée du bouleversement de notre cher pays. (13 Aug. 1871)

Before the war, *Le Vélocipède illustré* was published twice weekly. Afterward, it was published only six times as *La Vitesse* in July and August 1871, then once a week from May to October 1872, and then not for years until reappearing as a weekly publication in 1890.

In late spring 1872, as Le Grand Jacques was relaunching his newspaper under its previous title, *Le Vélocipède illustré*, he summed up the *Année terrible* in these terms:

Ce n'est pas que la Vélocipédie n'ait eu à supporter de rudes épreuves dans les temps sinistres que nous venons de traverser. Mais c'était le sort commun, et elle a d'autant plus souffert qu'elle comptait ses adeptes et ses partisans dans la jeunesse agile et militante du pays. Des ravages singuliers ont été faits dans nos rangs, et au sortir d'une lutte fatale, on a pu croire la Vélocipédie morte. Comme le phénix, elle renaît de ses cendres. (2 May 1872)

The *Vélocipédie*, like France itself, suffered during the siege and the Commune. Another spring gave hope to a weakened population, to a struggling industry, and to a pastime that had seemed out of place amid the gravity of war. The furor the velocipede inspired never returned to prewar levels. It took new technologies like chains, gears, and pneumatic tires for the mania of the bicycle to fully reignite in the late 1880s. Though mechanization led to excesses, wars, and confinement, the bicycle proved to be the other side of the mechanized coin. It provided freedom of movement particularly for the working class, for women, and for commuters and enthusiasts of all genders and ages. But during the Commune, the velocipede encapsulated the best and the worst of the growing mechanical age: it provided liberty, liberation, and mobility but also came to be seen as either out of step with the time or as one more tool that could be used for bellicose, destructive, and oppressive ends.

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NOTES

1. In his history of the velocipede, Kobayashi notes that competition and lawsuits had significantly weakened the velocipede market in Paris before the war. He adds, however, that “la guerre entre la France et la Prusse porta un coup que l’on peut qualifier de mortel à l’industrie vélocipédique” (311).

2. For a detailed description of Rossel and his role in the Commune, see Maurey, particularly 137–65.

3. For an analysis of the cultural significance of the velocipede and its symbolic currency in 1868 and 1869, see Cropper and Whidden.

4. In 1883, the 200th issue of *La Caricature* published the second *Guerre au Vingtième Siècle* sequence, a series of images and a fantastical but terrifying tale of scientific warfare. Robida’s best-known effort under this title is the 1887 album *La Guerre au Vingtième Siècle* (Paris: Georges Decaux, 1887).

5. Viche 112. “La Guerre au 20^e siècle – Campagne de Jujubie” is an unpublished album Robida created between 1869 and 1870 (Viche 113). Only a few of this album’s 150 illustrations saw the light of day at the time, and still very few have been published since. Among them was a double vignette of velocipedes Robida published in 1869 as “the art of war” (“Dictionnaire des connaissances utiles” 413). His illustration contrasted past and future warfare: The war of the past featured two armored knights mounted on horses; in a futuristic 1925, velocipedes and flying contraptions took the place of the mounted knights. The substitution reveals Robida conflating velocipedomania and his own preoccupation with war.

6. In figure 2, Robida seems to channel the form of insect swarms that mark nineteenth-century representations of Parisian urbanism. As Kristin Ross has argued, calling on Nietzsche’s use of the threat of the swarm, the socio-spatial poetics that the Paris Commune inspired in Rimbaud are grounded in a “swarm poesis,” an effect of the teeming crowds of workers “stripped of individual subjectivity” overcoming the capital (113, 108).

7. Though he resisted taking sides, Robida wrote in his personal journal in the spring of 1871, “Je connais du monde dans la Commune [. . .] J’avais des amis, Vermesh, Pilotell, personnages importants, sans compter Vallès” (from private family documents cited in Doré, “Témoin” 35).

8. Made up of 177 drawings, this chronicle would only be published (with an introduction and notes added by Lucien Scheler in 1971) as *Album du Siège et de la Commune*. On the figure of the wheel in this album are his many sketches of cannon batteries at barricades during the war and the early weeks of the Commune. And in the case of post-conflict debris, consider the lone detached wheel lying on a pile of rubble in “11 nov Bobigny” (figure 70, *Album du Siège*) and in “Saint-Cloud” (figure 129), or the overturned cart of “Noisy-le-Sec” used with pavés for a barricade (figure 47). For all the wheels on carriages, horse-drawn carts, ambulances, and omnibuses that figure in the

Paris iconography of the Terrible Year, the cannon wheel is unquestionably the most significant. The events of 18 March that precipitated the declaration of the Commune occurred when soldiers of Thiers's national government attempted, unsuccessfully, to reclaim the cannons of dissident National Guard units arrayed above Paris on the Butte Montmartre. Unsurprisingly, cannons figure prominently in all four of Robida's sketches from 18–20 March (figures 142–45).

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