

July 4, 2003

A slow start to the morning, but it's agreed: you all want to head for the Marais. Quick trainride into St-Lazare. Some wandering, still jet-lagged, meet up with Rosemary, and together into the Hôtel Carnavalet, the museum of the city of Paris. Rooms full of paintings, shop signs, scale models and vernacular treasures of the city's pasts. Then you cross a threshold and arrive quite unexpectedly in the jaw-dropping surround of an entirely other era: the reconstituted wall and ceiling murals of the *Salle de bal de l'hôtel Wendel*. Transported from the old hotel – demolished? – on Avenue de New York, the Queen of Sheba and her entourage prepare to depart for King Solomon's court. At the head of the procession rides Sheba herself – side-saddle upon the back of the most brobdingnagian of a score of elephants.

A throng has assembled to mark her leave-taking: clusters of acrobats, scribes and their monkeys, a gaggle of entrail-reading priests. From whichever angle, no matter where in the room you stand, you find yourself amidst her retinue. The smoke of torches lit to shield the queen from the sun billows upward through a festooned bower and drifts into an illusory sky. Bold forms, deftly rendered in tri-tone: black and deep red varnish upon a field of white gold leaf. This is the work of José Maria Sert, a Catalan of hallucinatory imagination and loose, confident brushwork – a sort of Tiepolo for the Jazz Age.

How is it that such a masterpiece escaped your prior notice? Both you and this painting existed – the latter since the early '20s – yet until now, you never met! And on the heels of this crazy notion, a strange surge of optimism: your eyes are not entirely insensible to the new. You are still capable of enchantment.

May 13

Cargo Ships Treading Water Off Singapore, Waiting for Work



Charles Pertwee for The New York Times

Sunrise in the Strait of Malacca between Indonesia and Singapore, where 735 cargo ships were gathered Tuesday because of a sharp decline in global exports.

By KEITH BRADSHER

SINGAPORE — To go out in a small boat along Singapore's coast now is to feel like a mouse tiptoeing through an endless herd of slumbering elephants.

One of the largest fleets of ships ever gathered idles here just outside one of the world's busiest ports, marooned by the receding tide of global trade....

...Hundreds of cargo ships — some up to 300,000 tons, with many weighing more than the entire 130-ship Spanish Armada — seem to perch on top of the water rather than in it, their red rudders and bulbous noses, submerged when the vessels are loaded, sticking a dozen feet out of the water....

The world's fleet has nearly doubled since the early 1980s, so the tonnage of vessels in and around Singapore's waters this spring may be the highest ever, he said....

...These vessels total more than 41 million tons, according to the AIS Live

tracking service. That is nearly equal to the entire world's merchant fleet at the end of World War I, and represents almost 4 percent of the world's fleet today.

Investment trusts have poured billions of dollars over the last five years into buying ships and leasing them for a year at a time to shipping lines. As the leases expire and many of these vessels are returned, losses will be heavy at these trusts and the mainly European banks that lent to them, said Stephen Fletcher, the commercial director for AXS Marine, a consulting firm based in Paris.

In previous shipping downturns, vessels anchored for months at a time in Norwegian fjords and other cold-weather locations. But stringent environmental regulations in practically every cold-weather country are forcing idle ships to warmer anchorages.

But that raises security concerns. Plants grow much faster on the undersides of vessels in warm water. "You end up with the hanging gardens of Babylon on the bottom and that affects your speed," said Tim Huxley, the chief executive of Wah Kwong Maritime Transport, a shipping line based in Hong Kong.

One of the company's freighters became so overgrown that it was barely able to outrun pirates off Somalia recently, Mr. Huxley said. The freighter escaped with 91 bullet holes in it....

The fishing boats go out across the evening water
Smuggling guns and arms across the Spanish border
The wind whips up the waves so loud
The ghost moon sails among the clouds
Turns the rifles into silver on the border...

...Another of the company's freighters close to Singapore was hit last December by a chemical tanker that could not make a tight enough turn in a crowded anchorage; neither vessel was seriously damaged....

... "It is a sign of the times," said AIS Martin Stopford, the managing director of Clarkson Research Service in London, "that Asia is the place you want to hang around this time in case things turn around."

...In the islands where I grew up
Nothing seems the same
It's just the patterns that remain
An empty shell
But there's a strangeness in the air you feel too well...

Chanté Al Stewart kan ya makan

MBS, mindblowing shit.

And the Land of Punt. With its double-bellied Queen.

But today in la Sierra Madre: "They come; they kill the trees and afterwards we have to choose: either we leave our lands or we stay to grow their drugs," says a Tarahumara, one of the "light-footed" people, who own that one cannot "sell what belongs to Mother Earth and Father God."

How many CIA drugdeals gone bad will it take to make us wise?

...You ain't got to be so bad got to be so cold
This dog eat dog existence sure is getting old
Got to have a jones for this jones for that
This running with the joneses boy
Just ain't where it's at
You gonna come back around
To the sad sad truth the dirty lowdown...

Chanté William Royce Scaggs at the tail of what remained of The Day.

How many fakers,
Peace undertakers,
Paid strike breakers,
How many toiling, ailing,
Dying, piled-up bodies, Brother,
Does it take to make you wise?

One big question inside me cries,
How many frame-ups,
How many shake-downs,
How many sell-outs,
How many toiling, ailing,
Dying, piled-up bodies, Brother,
Does it take to make you wise?

Chanté Mark Blitzstein two-score years pre-Boz.

May 15



Trouble ahead, lady in red...

Trouble with you is trouble with me.

Got two good eyes but we still don't see...

Thirty-four years and two weeks ago, Hubert Van Es, who for years had covered a wide swath of The American War, looked out a window of the U.P.I. office in Saigon, and saw something curious going down, or rather up, over at the CIA compound a few blocks away. He popped on a long lens and...



...made this picture – the rights to which U.P.I. eventually sold to Bill Gates's image bank, Corbis. Van Es climbed the stairway to heaven today, aged 67.

...Trouble ahead, trouble behind...

Operation Frequent Wind: U.S. military codename for the mass helicopter evacuation from Sigh. Gone.

...And you know that notion just crossed my mind...

Interviewed back in the year 2000, for an article on the 25th anniversary of Saigon's fall, Duong Thanh Phong, a North Vietnamese combat photographer recalled:

...just standing at the back of the car, shooting backward as we headed into the city. The car was going vroom, vroom, vroom as we drove over the boots [cast off by fleeing South Vietnamese soldiers] like a boat going over waves. I was just happy. Happy. It was fun driving over the boots, bumping up and down.

You can't vote – or hope – yourself off the Great Gameboard. That sort of Change would entail a far more sustained and risky process. A whole different level of collective intention.

WouldaShouldaCoulda

YOUR AD HERE

May 16

Five hours ago, at 6 a.m. New York time, aka 12 noon GMT, the bell-ringers of the carillon of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral pealed, in its entirety, the melody of John Lennon's "Imagine."

The cathedral's thirteen bells, taken together at 16.5 tons and hung 219 feet above floor level, comprise the highest and heaviest ringing peal in the world.

Meet George Jetsam.



ENE. The Empire State comes down with the vapors.

May 17

The blue and black gold pipelines of the world are at once a Medusa's head and a Gordian Knot – either mode unsusceptible to heroic.

Age of asymmetry drones on. Another forty murdered from the air at a North Waziristan madrassa.

Even as Obamanation proposes a budget that would raise (official) military aid to Israel by ten percent, bringing it close to \$3 billion.

And yet, and yet...

YouTube offers up a clip of yesterday's Liverpool carillon which you listen to on speakers only marginally able do some justice to the boudon bell, Great George. And

hearing “Imagine” thus pealed makes you even more acutely aware of your distaste both harmonically and lyrically for the song itself.

But of course words and intervals are interwoven, and you realize that what turns you off here is Lennon’s combination of the mawkish and superior – with all its coercive potential – a marriage of qualities Lennon himself would deplore were he not the deployer. And how vastly this purportedly radical song opens the gap between any *imaginable* I and Thou.

Imperatives are tricky and the message we receive depends so much upon the quality of utterance. In what space and circumstance does being told to “Imagine,” put the listener?

“It’s easy if you try...”

“I wonder if you can...”

“I hope some day you’ll join us...”

The whole’s shot through with passive aggression – as though Calvin was simply too sentimental to divide the saved from the damned by any mode other than rueful implication.

Imagine there’s no Heaven

It’s easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us only sky

Imagine all the people

Living for today

Imagine there’s no countries

It isn’t hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace

You may say that I’m a dreamer

But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world

You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

C.f. the roughly contemporary Sly Stone song that also begins with a single word imperative:

Stand
In the end you'll still be you
One that's done all the things you set out to do

Stand
There's a cross for you to bear
Things to go through if you're going anywhere

Stand
For the things you know are right
It's the truth that the truth makes them so uptight

Stand

All the things you want are real
You have you to complete and there is no deal
Stand. Stand, stand
Stand. Stand, stand

Stand
You've been sitting much too long
There's a permanent crease in your right and wrong

Stand
There's a midget standing tall
And the giant beside him about to fall
Stand. Stand, stand
Stand. Stand, stand

Stand
They will try to make you crawl
And they know what you're saying makes sense and all

Stand
Don't you know that you are free?
Well at least in your mind if you want to be
Everybody
Stand, stand, stand

And again, the question begs: who are those these and them? And us'n? I me me mines?

In certain congregations and situations, the word *Amen* could easily be mistaken, by even those with acute hearing, for *I'm in*.

Me wheat. You chaff.

I do not know

Says the great bell of Bow



Full court press of spring.