

by Gord Sellar, published in [Headlight Anthology](#), Volume 4, 2001.

## Trauerspiel

I.

Dress nimbly; move with dignities through these halls.  
Rise when you please, even when the sun has fallen;  
I would give you all I have, my beloved Sovereigns—  
I would fail to dream of regicides, even given provocation,  
And naked in the streets, I would think you *philosophes*.

Every thing is gauzed in a webwork of gold:  
Come now, take my hand and I will guide you.  
There are flutes, heavy drums and silver horns  
Brought out to please you, and all the children here  
Have fretted themselves like viols, so that now  
They shimmer a sightly music, faces to be read  
And red with delight, for your sake, yours alone.

II.

What I see when I shut my eyes is an army of cellists  
sawing endlessly, mathematical menuets  
and other courtly dances that spin in the form  
of electrons, hidden in the drowse of wires  
that gird the planet. Pavana lachrymae:

digits. Only numbers. Beautiful, sacred;  
counting off the balances of the world,  
such as angels once were called to do.  
A calculus of agreements, waivers, shipments,  
in this language resembling that of lovers.

Wealth begets wealth. And so we endless sweep,  
invisible whorling courtly currents so that  
nobody is known by name or face. I can't  
find you, if I ever need to I will be  
in such a predicament: why are the gods invisible?

III.

Our bodies titillate, don't they, when we go  
to the lengths that have been specified here, before us?

Hunger. It is the one true *zeitgeist*, now.  
The country filled with yawning ulcers.

Nothing fills it, although it can be hidden  
from view. And we are engineered desolations.

If there are still angels, what do they sing about?  
Profanities? The wages of our endeavours?

I hope sincerely that they have lost their sight,  
and if there's a God, that blindness has struck the poor thing.

Last night I went out once again, and I  
bought something that I didn't know I needed.

IV.

I once wanted to be a Thoreau myself,  
drop out and say farewell forever to  
this world I found myself in. But it won't  
change a thing, conversing with the birds,  
or resolving to myself that I'll know beans.

The husbandry is one thing, I agree.  
But scavenging and sleeping in the wild  
tears nothing down, it is not made even  
of words. And sharing in the hunger that we've made  
is cosmetic. Because we always must return.

There is some thing that calls us, maybe because  
it's always been there, since our first recall?  
Because there is a truth to luxury? Or because  
we know that it is part of us already?  
That history must dance until it stops?

V.

That's right. The world is a concubine. Cram it in.

I suspect the scent will linger for a long time.

Incalculable, the unwritten verdicts that wait  
at the other end of history. They will speak of us,  
but I have no idea what they'll say. I hope  
that they harbour pity and maybe feel  
of the kind of shock that children show, discovering  
that some people are born into the world blind  
and realizing that this means they cannot see.

---

*The Trauerspiel is a type of allegorical tragic drama which was popular in Germany during (at least) the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is normally a five-act play dealing with the pomp and power of a ruler, who, though the forces of history and the actions of himself and others, moves from lavish and glorious spectacle, comical interludes and supernatural experiences toward the recognition of the role of Fate in the transience of the earthly flourishing of all passionate and powerful rulers. The monarch's rule—not subject to human judgment but only to that of the invisible forces that placed the ruler in power—declines toward the end of the drama until the ruler's life and glory are simultaneously snuffed out, like a candle, by the will of Fate.*

© 2001 Gord Sellar