

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 17th and 18th 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.

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