

# Welt

by Jelani John

1.

Have you ever spent 20 minutes staring at the rain pouring down on the asphalt? You stare and you stand and you begin to notice. You begin to see things that, otherwise, you would never have observed.

A light summer rain falling on the street corner. You notice it first. It's raining. This is an inescapable fact. The street is oozing wet. There are puddles here and there. Droplets hit your skin. To think: "No. This is not rain," does not occur to you. You accept it automatically and move on.

If you focus your eyes, you can make out individual raindrops passing by. They hit the big puddles and ripples burst outward, large and fat, blending with each other. On the flat street surfaces there are ripples too. Smaller. More concise. On sharp edges, they split and deviate.

The surface of the street, if you stare at one spot, appears to somehow be melting. It clearly cannot be moving, yet there is that illusion. A liquidity that calls for closer observation. It's entrancing.

As you stand there, not moving, you begin to notice other things. There's a hole in your umbrella. Your socks are wet. Water rolls down your neck and it tickles. A little itch. The rain has a sound. A soothing rhythm interrupted as a car passes by.

So what is all this? Call it... an initiation into the micro. A world that most only think about in passing. In abstract. A place where the scientists dwell. And yet, having had stood here, in the rain for 20 minutes, you cannot help but be entranced. Where does this lead?

*To see the meritorious action in the meanest of things we must first delve into the sunset of being. Distracting and grabbing from the honorable left and impeccable right. The lay is wed, the way is led and a disastrous form must be asked.*

2.

Let us start with the ideas of *umwelt* and *weltanschauung*. According to Jacob von Uexküll, *umwelt* (meaning "environment" or "surrounding world", but often translated as "self-centered world") is the biological foundation and semiotic world that lies at the very epicenter of the study of both communication and signification in the human and non-human animal. Basically, it is how one perceives the world. It changes and reshapes based on one's biology and unique history.

*Weltanschauung* ( meaning "world view" ), on the other hand, is more concerned with the cognitive state or an individual or group of individuals and encompasses philosophy, values, emotions, and ethics. The framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it. Put simply, one's view on life.

There is a relationship between the weltanschauung and the umwelt. The weltanschauung changes, and so does the umwelt. The umwelt changes and the weltanschauung may not.

*O! Grand mystery of the mind and his surroundings. Biological THRUST and SWAY, the mind is the phallic symbol that pierces the body and speaks through it. Der Wertbilden that eat through the sexy under-layer of life's framework.*

*That is the truth of it. The perception changes the structure. The structure informs the perception.*

3.

There is a flaw.

Or maybe it isn't a flaw. Perhaps it's a self-defense mechanism. Or a lack of time. Or lack of desire. Or maybe it's even a general feeling of "I don't care." But whatever it is, it's common and rampant and, like a disease, should not be left unchecked.

You see, people, as they grow older, are less likely to want to learn new things, change their beliefs, or face certain things in life. In particular we should be concerned with the latter. People see certain topics... certain issues as distasteful and form beliefs and ill-formed stereotypes based on their unwillingness to face or think about such topics.

And so, let us call it a flaw. It is perhaps, not necessary that it be corrected. Yet, it is important that it be addressed.

*Address it sir, put it in a dress and call it a dog and still the issue will not change. There is a striking path to be laid, a magical figurine that*

*changes when you do. A ream of cloth and parchment and ink. How many books have been written on this? How many tears have been shed? How much change must be wrought?*

*Though it is not for me to lecture, it is for me to sojourn and invite me on my journey with you.*

4.

To do so, however, is difficult. One cannot just say "such and such a thing is true" or "this is what you must believe." People do not respond well to that sort of diatribe. You have to coax them, startle them, or somehow guide them along a path to an idea. You must force them to reveal the idea to themselves.

And to do this, in this day and age at least, animation is key. Writers have been doing this since before we can remember. The world of literature has been exposing these uncomfortable truths time and time again. Song writers and poets have been revealing them since time immemorial. But in animation... it is rare that you see this happen. Sometimes it does. Don't get me wrong. But not nearly as often.

Animation is particularly suited in this era for revealing things uncomfortable and true. There are several things that come out during the very act of watching animation that play off your receptive state.

*Do not seek to guide the masses. Trim the fat and build the weak to mingle with the strong. Hold education as key, but only when pressured at fire dragons from stream hoses.*

*The steam billows and falls; forms smoke signals, then smoke columns, then*

*mighty pillars upon which we may climb up into the clouds.*

*Climbing clouds of smoke to play in smoky clouds.*

5.

Let us return to the corner. The asphalt and the rain. Standing still as it comes down. Focusing on the macro and noticing the micro.

Standing still. Sitting still. Ask anyone who studies meditation and they'll espouse the notion of sitting still as vital to relaxing, clearing the mind and being tranquil. What it does is focus the attention. But you find when you do this that it is not easy to do without wanting something to grab and focus the attention on.

Animation does this. To see it just observe the children. Even the most active child will pause to observe an engaging song, story or scene.

You sit still because you're engaged. Because you sit still, you're more focused. You're drawn in and become immersed. You, in effect, enter a different realm.

*Before traveling to different realms, clear your mind of all thought, leave behind your decisions. This is a place you have never been. This is a place where all things exist. This is a place of forever.*

*You enter as loci of existence in a new universe. It is as if you have been given birth to and now you must relearn the rules all over again.*

6.

This realm that you enter is one of suspended disbelief. Suspended disbelief is a

term traced back to Samuel T. Coleridge, who described it as a stance taken by readers of poetry that was necessary to accept the fictive world proposed in literary work. In addition to the premises in the fiction it also refers the willingness of an audience to overlook any limitations a medium may have.

This is usually, if not always a *do ut des*. In exchange for this suspension, some form of entertainment must be provided. And it is in this realm of focused attention and suspended disbelief that the true power of animations and storytelling come out.

*My lower body is separating from my upper body. I'm floating and sinking at the same time. A key to being 'human' is being able to hold two contradicting thoughts in your head at the same. Time. The rock is floating. The rock will fall.*

*Here is the basic theme behind the concept of magic. This is what I know. This is what happened. My world does not explain it. Therefore it is magic. Magic does not exist in this world. It can only exist in the next.*

7.

When pushing a concept, a new, perhaps unwanted idea at a person, there is a question that must be addressed. What is the mood that you seek?

In your desire to show them what you wish them to see, you may lean towards the macabre. To disgust, shock, scare and horrify. Or you may lean towards the pithy, the poignant; the delightful, distressful – in truth the direction matters only as much as you keep in your head that the essential mood is that of *revelation*.

Of truth. There are truths in this world that are sometimes harsh, sometimes beautiful, sometimes thought not to exist. And yet they are there nonetheless.

*Is it of course, impossible to hide from me. They of course, do not exist. What makes me think that you are real? That you are an entity separate from me? Why do you not cease to exist when you enter another room... is there another room at all?*

*If, when I talk to you, I talk to myself, I must be crazy, for only crazy people talk to themselves. Only crazy people hold willingly hide knowledge from themselves.*

*And if all this is true, then should I not decipher the world and see me for who I am?*

8.

One of the most intriguing things about animation as a revelatory device, compared to song, literature or image is its ability to combine the best of all three.

The earliest forms of communication were symbol based, going back over thirty thousand years ago. Writing came into existence around 7 thousand years ago. And even now, images still hold far more power than words and are necessary to communicate (especially among those communities where the majority of people are illiterate).

The common saying is that a picture is worth a thousand words. And that saying holds truth! A picture can cross language boundaries and indeed can be far more descriptive than words can. However, their great strength is also their weakness.

Your weltanschauung informs how you interpret a picture. The same picture can possibly say different things to different people. They can even look different to different people. And your umwelt may change how you see it compared to another.

The same goes holds true for song. Musical expression and interpretation varies wildly across cultures (though many similarities exist). In America, minor chords are generally sad, but in India, G-minor is a happy chord!

In animation you can combine them all. Words, images, and music come together to create a unified gestalt. It draws the user in and allows you to reveal your ideas in the manner that hopefully is as clear as you wish it to be.

You can do the same in film. However, animation tends to be more versatile (and usually much cheaper!). You can take things a bit further; make them more abstract, more unreal than you can in film.

Be careful in your combinations! You must know your audience and react to them before they even react to themselves. One man may cry where another will laugh. The variables are too numerous to count.

*The most aberrant thing of all is the feeling of excitement! The knowledge that 'I am about to experience something that is not real.' You go forward, KNOWING that you have been tricked. Knowing that you will be shackled, bamboozled, fiddled, doodled and spat. And still you go! You yearn for revelation. You seek it even as you shy away.*

*There is a feeling of the mischievous child here. The young one who can, with honest heart, have an invisible friend and totally believe it to be true.*

*Once we make the distinction then, though clearly advantageous, the flaw begins. This is the fallen feeling. The feeling of age that cannot be captured by youth. The feeling of youth relinquished by age.*

9.

“This is what I think and this is what I feel. Now how can I share it with others?”

You have your own weltanschauung, informed by your own umwelt. Others have theirs. The umwelten of any two humans are likely to be the similar. The weltanschauungs are not.

When you take them into the unreal, the concepts you show them will, when they exit that space, either stick, or not. Hopefully, the flaw will be healed and they will, if not confront, at least be made aware of these elements which they have not faced.

Remember when you reveal, neither prescribe nor proscribe. The reveal is enough. Show them the micro and (hopefully) it will come through in their macro.

*A young man falls to the floor, a dagger in his back. Another sits on the stoop. The young man says, “It hurts.”*

*The other sees it hurts. The other hears it hurt. The other says, “Ah. So he is in pain.” This is the meta-text.*

*The other eats his lollipop.*

*You can never understand the person standing next to you. They will forever be a stranger, even if they tell you exactly what they feel and you follow them every day. At most you*

*can have a sense, a general feeling that ‘yes maybe so and so feels so.’ But really you will never truly know. An inkling is all you can achieve. When I cry, do you cry with me and feel my pain?*

10.

Have you ever spent 20 minutes staring at the rain pouring down on the asphalt? What happens when the rain stops? What happens when the 20 minutes is up?

Most likely... nothing. There are no fanfares or trumpets. No grand revelations or moments of clarity. You pick up and go about your business. Your mind goes ahead to think about laundry and work and your love life and the children.

And yet... and yet the fact remains that you’ve had this experience and you are perhaps subtly changed by it. Perhaps it only comes out on rainy days when you glance out the window and reminisce. Perhaps you start to notice the little things in life more. Perhaps you start to stop and breathe more. Perhaps you never think of it again.

Such are the vagaries of the mind and life. We have these experiences and are changed forever. Or not. And to craft such an experience is both a privilege and a pleasure.

*There was no cover, maybe. No picture. No time. This was the element of insanity that burned itself into said order of the world.*

*Circles forever returning complete.*

*Die ist Welt.*

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