A Letter to the Sane...

On 23rd July I heard that Boris Johnson was UK prime minister. I decided not anymore to listen to the news. The resolution last ten seconds. Not listening would be internal exile. Its how some people survived living in Stalin’s Russia and Hitler’s Germany.

Johnson’s first speech as prime minister could not be taken seriously but that made it even more serious because it would be taken seriously. It reminds me of 1930’s Germany. The speech was a Hitlerite comic rant. Hitler was popular because he improved the economy. So does Trump. It doesn't solve one social problem. Increased affluence increases poverty. That’s the structural truth of Capitalism. It cant unite the country unless it also corrupts the poor. Fascist’s secret is to make the poor love them. To do this Fascism must provide the poor with alternative victims to absorb their hate: Jews, immigrants, people of colour, Romanies. The structure is deeper than politics. Its the structure of reality. And our relation to the structure is immanent in the structure. Culturally even the affluent suffer from Fascism. Affluence is their hedonic-starvation. The promised paradise of Capitalism becomes hell. Capitalism must slide into Fascism and destroy itself and the world it grasps. Trump’s Fascism inevitably tells him there is no global warming. All of this is in the structural logic of reality.

For many thousands of years people organised themselves into societies in a certain way. The way no longer works. We have to create a new way of being together. It depends on the logic of the relation between what and why. Its the work of drama.

Some years ago I told some friends Johnson would become Prime Minister. They laughed. (I only half-believed it myself.) The situation changes. Farrage will become Prime Minister.”

So I’ll follow the news, listen to Johnson threatening the country with his baby rattle, count the victims. Nineteenth-thirties Germans didn’t know what was being done to them. We know what’s being done to us. Later it will help others to know we knew. I’ve written a new (I hope simpler) paper on drama and our situation. Its called “What is Why?” I’m sending it to a few friends whose work in drama I respect. I’m like someone far out in an ocean who finds a bottle with a message in it. I open the bottle. The message gives swimming instructions. Thanks.

WHAT IS WHY?  
Edward Bond 2019

What is drama and how does it relate to young people? The human situation can be understood through the two questions of what and why. “Whats” concern the objectivity of nature and of technology in the broadest sense, manmade and natural. “Whys” have to do with consciousness. They seek reasons. Animals may be aware and focus on what “X” will do. In animals all things are reduced to appetite and instinct. This remains true of domesticated animals who may imitate humans. Animals relate to humans as higher status animals in the herd. They can’t recognise the human as human because they are not human themselves.

The human why question can’t be reduced to what, not even by tyranny. The human why is unique in the universe. If elsewhere in the universe beings unlike us physically – whose skin was, say, crocodile
scales – but who could ask why, they would be human. Why makes us human and also the drama species.

The difference between what and why, animal and human, is essential. It is a basis of the drama theory I write about often. Here I repeat the gist without the supporting arguments.

What is consciousness? The new born child is a tabula rasa, like a sheet of paper with nothing human written on it. Physically prepared and intended to be human. The technical name for this is the neonate-monad. All of us are born in this state. Later we can only imagine it. It lies beyond memory because it has no “before.” The new born thinks it is the whole of reality. It thinks that all the external (the whats) is part of itself (its why). Think of a dream. It isnt real but seems to be – as in the panic of nightmare. Or in reverse, imagine a film: everything is confined to a flat screen and only appears real. Or think of letters before you can read. The letters are a jumble of shapes. You learn to read and r-e-d means the colour red. There must be such a new born state. It isnt known how long it lasts – minutes, hours, days, longer. Reading is a culturally learned ability. You cant suddenly learn to read. It is a what. You can never learn to be human. It is unteachable and is sudden. It is consciousness. You can learn only what humans do in your culture. You are a why. You can learn “why.” No other species can be taught to be human. Consciousness is the meaning you give to what you know.

The new born infant thinks it is the whole of reality, that reality is a cosmic chaos without cause and effect.Whats without whys. It is aware of two urgencies, pleasure and pain. The new born is the whole of reality and so when it is in, say, pain then reality is in pain. What you know as sky earth buildings furniture dust rain everything, is in your pain. (Later this is repeated in the ability to watch the duality of drama.) A drama is reality and imagination and the imagined should be the less real of the two: yet it is is not because it prioritises morality. When the new born distinguishes between pleasure and pain, in the act of distinguishing it creates its “self.” The self chooses pleasure over pain. That is the first instance of the distinction between what and why. The response (why) is not the same as the effect that is distinguished, it is particular to consciousness. The self’s distinguishing what and why is the instantiation of the human self. (Negatively consciousness is knowing what it is not -- though later, ideology may blur this). The self has the freedom and burden of choice. The new born creates the self in this one event: the distinction between self and otherness (external reality) and morality (pleasure over pain, good over bad), and together the three create humanness and the imperative to be human. The imperative is synonymous with being human. A human cant cease to be human until death (which is also a corner in dramatic tragedy). Corruption comes later from surviving (or succeeding) in corrupt society. It is the text of drama.

There is a dilemma: if the new born was the whole of reality why was reality in pain and not just in pleasure? Was the self what morality later would know as evil? This becomes a platform of ideology. It is as if every step the self took was on a trapdoor. The whole stage is a trap door.

Society is complicated. We share the world but no one can get into another’s consciousness. That is a startling limitation. If it were otherwise there could be no society or creativity, only regimentation. This isn't, of course, a problem for what and pre-human animals. Consciousness is the responsibility for morality instantiated in itself by the new born when it was the whole of reality. You can see that civilization is based on loss, on authority’s complications and corruptions, as well as on gains. Innocence is pristine but already redundant. Evolution of pre-human animals proceeds through successful accidents. The survival of the fittest is the fittest to survive. Humans are conscious and seek reason. Evolution has no morality and herds no justice. Historically all human societies have been unjust. Even Greek civilization was based on slavery. It is as if the Greek demos institutionally incorporated the new born’s duality of pleasure and pain in an illegitimate structure. The duality is
an enduring consequence of the way whys have related to whats. The modern nadir of this is Capitalism and Fascism. Humans seek reasons and the reasons become human culture. The culture must dominate the whole of organised reality. Organisation needed power. Ideology is the text and psychological instrument of power. It justifies injustice. We are the moral beings who create the unjust society. The cause of that is the relation between whats and whys. Social authority functions through injustice. This isn’t a basic reversal to animal nature and evolution. Corruption is implicit in human society not the human self. Evolution (whats) has no purpose. Humans (whys) seek reason and therefore purpose. Evolution is accidental, humanness is creativity. The first human creation is the self. That is repeated in all humans. In culture the accidents of evolution become the willed organisation of authority. The entanglement between whats and whys is drama’s subject. The text is morality against injustice.

Drama isn’t the visceral stimulation and entertainment effects of theatre. Those things are now part of the entertainment industry. Theatre is based on acting but drama is en-actment of why. Drama’s method is based on the search for why. The core of drama is the confrontation between justice and power, culturally between humanness and ideology. This confronts the antagonist with the choice between compromise with corruption and the self’s morality. In tragic drama the choice is morality.

Organising primitive life in forests and tundra led to injustice. Rousseau’s idyllic primitives are fantasy. Over eons of time the biases and confrontations of injustice were established in institutions. This imposed corruption and rewarded it. Money organised the chaos of complexity. Money gave possession of whats and practical social power. All social justice is bought because it is unjust. The owners reduced some whys to whats, not only as slaves but also as citizens who co-operated with power and accepted its ideology. Ideology is cultural justification of injustice. But power cannot be monolithic. In the past power corrupted but all tyrannies failed. Till now the human imperative withstood all tyrannies and repressions, crude and subtle. The future may be otherwise. Power may seek to destroy all whys and corrupt humanness. The first two crises were times of resistance and revolution: ages of stone copper iron, first agricultural innovations, urbanisation, renaissance, reformation, enlightenment, industrialism. Modern technology caused conflict within and between powers. Capitalism led to world wars. We are in the third crisis.

Increasingly human life is paradoxical and collectively fractious. The reformation led to enlightenment. Industrialism exploited enlightenment. At first it was a human creative process until it led to Capitalism. Industrialism abolished ancient needs and poverty and created freedom but Capitalism is like a straitjacket that constantly shrinks and imprisons its wearer. Capitalism is not a system of human creativity, it reverts to evolution and its accidents. It develops not by supplying needs but by manufacturing wants and can never arrive at satisfaction. Culture becomes an advertising slogan. Capitalism changes whys into whats. It turns people into a function in the alimentation of mass wants. It makes us the excretory organ of nature. Capitalism cannot respond to the human why because it destroys the why. It will never stabilize society because the market seeks to replace reality with virtual reality, to make life a drug. Its secret wish is to destroy death – but cant. The origin of the human problem lies in the duality of the new born: the presence of both pleasure and pain -- Siamese twins joined at the brain. Death is not a final act. It is an echo of nothingness that has no origin but must sound in our lives if we are not to be morally giddy and mentally insane. It is synonymous with the morality at the core of drama. Capitalism is the haut couture of the scarecrow. And the third crisis is the death of the scarecrow.

Human life’s relation to death isn’t morbid. Death secures our human relation to reality. No animal knows death. If we did not know death we would treat one another as whats, as animals.
Capitalism changes the character of all structures of society. In the past politicians related to peoples’ needs, wants and sufferings. This secured politicians their practical power. Modern politicians replace needs, wants and sufferings with consumption. Capitalism seeks to supply practical wants and needs not for the consumers’ sakes but for the sake of Capitalism. Capitalism relentlessly seeks profit, it is its lifeblood and first moral duty. Its structural workings create financial and social crises. People suffer and government compensates Capitalists and bankers. The crises are not crises for the Capitalist. They are part of the working of the Capitalist system. They get rid of institutional deadwood and more importantly they create new opportunities for exploitation. Crises are a form of creative destruction essential to its existence and growth. Social recovery is a want to be used and exploited. The crises don’t damage Capitalism, they strengthen it. But you do not sharpen a knife by sticking it into a body.

Capitalism has no social responsibility or even duty. The market takes the place of these things. The holders of political power are no longer politicians. They are salespeople with the culture and ethics of the salesroom. They have power but no responsibility. Profit replaces responsibility. Politicians have become comics and clowns. All cultures recognise the ludic dangerousness of clowns. They exploit the situation instead of controlling it. They don’t know what they do. The clown-politicians’ incompetence makes the situation more dangerous. Their incompetence enlarges the scope of their reaction. Modern Fascism still needs scapegoats – Jews, coloured people, immigrants. The skill of reaction is to turn the people against the people. All conservative politics now slide into reaction and as that solves nothing conservatism slides into Fascism. From embarrassment it is called populism – but it is Fascism. Fascism needs excess. Modern Fascism is not the Hitlerite nostalgia for the past. The real scapegoats of Modern Fascism are the people. The ghetto is the street you live in. In the increasing unrest the street becomes the scene of crime and violence. The whole structure of society breaks down. The wellbeing of the human world collapses. Armaments can no longer keep us safe. Atom bombs were dropped on Japan to end a war. The final act of modern Fascism will be to start a war with nuclear weapons. All this comes from the simplest of relationship, that between whats and whys. It repeats the cosmic drama in the new born when it was the whole of reality. Reality cant be broken up into bits and we cant escape from it. Capitalism repeats that first relationship of whats and whys, as all human structures must. Its reality cant be avoided. The new born infant found morality in it – but Capitalism seeks only profit. Capitalism, our society, has ceased to create humanness. And if we abandon creativity and return to the accidents of evolution that will not ensure the survival of the fittest: evolution was not armed with nuclear weapons.

The new born took itself to be the whole of reality. It defend itself against chaos by instantiating morality. Its internal reality was the means through which we fitted into external reality. The external and inner reality contain each other and we are contained in that relationship. The relationship is made human and safe through morality. We substitute profit for morality – and profit is the absolute form of evolution.

I puzzle over the relationship between reality and drama. This paragraph is a tentative exploration. The new born was to itself the whole of reality. The human self is founded in that error. External reality was then “in- formed” in internal reality. Reality wasn’t the exterior that our cognitive senses could perceive and relate to. (It is why a God is posited in external reality but paradoxically God is said to be moral yet the reality he created isnt. The conundrum is deviously manipulative.) (Does morality in some way defined the dual relationship as moral?) Capitalism destroys the moral relationship of the self to the self and makes the self vulnerable in a way that neither mind nor body can cope with because they do not know how. The instrumental relationship of self to not-self is broken. Modern society strives to change, to relate to, to cope with, the breakdown. It is not decided, known, who is to be responsible for the change. All that is clear is the slippage towards reaction, clown-politicians and Fascism. On the stage drama creatively re-unites the two realities.
The responsibility courses forwards and backwards between them. The third crisis is the crisis of the scarecrow.

Look closer at the logic of Capitalism because it is now the logic of your life. And reason, alone, cant change logic. The logic of Capitalism has been studied by the Chicago school of economists. Think of a street accident between two cars. It is indifferent to Capitalism who is responsible for the accident. What matters is the value and profit of the accident. The scrap value of the write-offs. The extra employment of emergency and salvage crews. Of police and journalists. The cost of amputating a leg – or two. Motorised wheelchair(s). Repairing and readjusting the road layout. New traffic signs. Court lawyers, insurance staff and their fees. The florists. The undertakers. Bystanders could have the advantage of being collateral damage. It is unfortunate that because of climate change (directly caused by Capitalism) rain might fall on the funerals. All these things bear price-tags and so feed back into market profits of capitalism and into GDP. It is unsociable to interpret from the victims’ point of view the responsibility for the accident – unless doing so prolongs a court wrangle. For Capitalism it is irrelevant who caused the accident. It is important only that both drivers were there so that the accident could happen. Drivers are raw material whats – the whats the market deals in.

Further more, accidents are good for the Capitalist evolutionary systems. Decent citizens are expected to fight and die for their country in war. The patriotic reasons were really commercial reasons, the world wars showed they were good for profit. It is the accident victims’ duty to die for their country’s good. It would be good business to design cars that had a structural tendency to crash (think of Volkswagen). It is all very simple and painless – it just removes the why from the what. Thatcher and Reagan were converted by the Chicago School of Economists. They accelerated the development of modern Fascism. Perhaps it is nostalgic to wish that there was an actuarial calculation of the extra deaths caused by the way they re-engineered society and hastening its decay.

Once morality was commanded by supernatural authority. In Greek drama the supernatural was the Gods. They were strangely human – belligerent and partisan in wars, adulterous, cunning and deceitful – but in a friendly way this bridged the gap between divine order and us. It catastrophically and tragically broke down in the last great Greek dramatist, Euripides. In Euripides’ “Orestes” God commanded Orestes to murders his mother, but later a lesser immortal – though still a god – told Orestes that God had made a mistake. With that drama stopped for two thousand years, until the reformation reformed God and freed the renaissance to create drama again. Morality is created in the new born self. It is not obedience to God or any authority. It is responsibility to the self. With that responsibility we are human and creative, without it we are animated nihilistic whats. When Greek society collapsed Rome wrote the last Greek play. But it said it was not fiction but reality. God was said to have murdered his son in reality but Orestes murdered his mother in dramatic imagination. Greek drama had used fiction to discover and create reality. Rome bound morality in obedience to authority. After that it was inevitable that the Athenian Theatre of Dionysus became the bloodbath of the Roman arena. It is the most startling development in history.

In our time Capitalism has turned drama into the consumer product of theatre and the entertainment industry. Greece created drama and the first democratic institutions at one and the same time. They go together and neither can exist without the other. To create a human society both are needed. Capitalism corrupts both and so slides towards Fascism. We have ceased to create humanness and the alternative is modern Fascism. That is in the logic of the relationship between objective and subjective, inner and outer, reality. The logic of all reality is in the relationship between what and why. If I had said in the 19th century that within a few decades of the new century Europe would be the site of technological extermination factories built by commercial industries and supplied by them with everything they needed to function except the victims – you would have said exaggeration. Now the threat is nuclear weapons in the hands of Fascist clowns. Fascists would
regard nuclear war as the fulfilment of their destiny. I don’t apologise for the word Fascist. I use it because its dead victims can’t.

Drama is a plot with contemporary relevance. Structurally it derives from the new born’s creation of the self and its moral imperative to be human. This imperative is the centre of every drama. Performance takes place in the three-fold brain. The first brain is the audience, the second brain is the actor. Together they share the brain of the new born self. It is common to all humans. The third brain is not the play: instead that articulates the question and its urgency. The third brain is the stage. The Greeks invented the stage as the public space in which the audience – in the triple brain – can together create humanness. The new born created morality in its isolated self for the world it shares with others. Drama works through the human self but it is about society.

This replaces propaganda, obedience and even teaching. Euripides’ question is our shared question. No one can face a more profound question because it involves everyone’s life. I began by asking about young people and drama. Increasingly instead of being educated the young are trained – or ignored. Authority dare not trust them with questions. It forces them to learn answers by rote. And because the young are close enough to their own time of self-questioning they find no truth in the rote answers and can only animate them with rage. Reaction’s first victims are children. You don’t have to send them to prison, just to bad schools. And when they react to being cheated they are thrown out of school and so out of society. I received a letter from a teacher who deals with many of these children. It is terrifying. They are denied all drama and any sort of creativity that – to return to the basis of this paper – allows “whys” to ask questions about “whats” and “whys.” Instead they are fed consumerism. Which is like stuffing puppets with sawdust. Worst of all, the victims imitate their victimisers. What else can they do, where else can they go? Fascism’s first victims are the young.

I quote from the letter: “. . . children who have completely failed. The ones who have repeatedly been rejected by the education system. Often despised and ridiculed by their own parents. All known to the police and frequently assaulted by them. They don’t feel they belong anywhere. They spend their time living in the margins – gathering in parks, consuming astonishing amounts of drugs and alcohol, hiding in their homes, communicating with one another through different forms of social media and watching endless hours of YouTube videos depicting violence, playing violent games on their devices. But they also desperately want to belong in as much as they need to consume the most expensive trappings of belonging – clothes, trainers, bags, phones, alcohol, cars, jewellery. And so they steal it. Many of them spend an enormous amount of time looking at themselves, taking photographs of themselves, commenting on how other people look. Their energy is all focused inwards. But the anger pours out as they feel rejected. They hate school. They hate the police. They hate most adults. But they also hate themselves.