

FROM EDINBURGH TO SHANGHAI;
INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS & THE GIFT OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE
SPEECH FOR
THE CHINA & SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL,
SHANGHAI, OCTOBER 2007-10-14

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN IT IS A HUGE HONOUR AND GREAT PLEASURE TO BE INVITED TO PRESENT A KEY-NOTE ADDRESS AT THE 9TH CHINA & SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL.

I WOULD LIKE TO OFFER MY SINCERE BEST WISHES FOR THE GREAT AND ONGOING SUCCESS OF THIS FESTIVAL. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO CONGRATULATE WEI ZHI AND MEMBERS OF THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE ON THE EXCELLENT PREPARATIONS OF THIS EDITION OF THE FESTIVAL

WHAT I PROPOSE TO TALK ABOUT IS THE IDEAS THAT LIE BEHIND FESTIVALS, SOME SPECULATIONS AS TO WHY THEY CONTINUE TO BE SUCH A POPULAR PHENOMENON INTO THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY, WHAT DRIVES US TO BE SO FASCINATED, ALMOST ADDICTED TO THIS CURIOUS, INTOXICATING, SOCIAL AND ARTISTIC RITUAL.

IT IS ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE SOME VERY PERSONAL FEELINGS ABOUT MY ROLE AS DIRECTOR OF THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL. NO LONGER A NOVICE, MY FIRST FESTIVAL FINISHED IN EARLY SEPTEMBER AND I ARRIVED IN SCOTLAND ALMOST EXACTLY A YEAR AGO.

FESTIVALS ARE UBIQUITOUS. THERE IS NO PLACE, NO CONTINENT NO COUNTRY NO COMMUNITY, NO CULTURE, NO CIVILISATION IN WHICH THEY ARE NOT PRESENT. THEIR OMNIPRESENCE WOULD SUGGESTS THAT THEY EXIST TO FULFIL A PROFOUND NEED IN HUMANITY.

FESTIVALS ARE CELEBRATIONS.

WHENEVER I START WORK ON A FESTIVAL PROGRAM, I AM ALWAYS INSPIRED BY A WONDERFUL QUOTATION FROM THE FRENCH PHILOSOPHER, MAURICE MERLEU-PONTY, WHO SAID "JUST AS PLACES ARE SENSED, SENSES ARE PLACED".

HE SEEMS TO DESCRIBE PERFECTLY THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SETTING AND THE SUBSTANCE THAT EXISTS AT THE CORE OF A TRUE FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE; THE BUZZ THAT EMANATES FROM HAVING SO MANY THINGS HAPPENING AT ONCE; OF KNOWING ONE IS SURROUNDED BY MANY, MANY EXCITING EVENTS AND REALISING THAT THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF EXPERIENCING THEM ALL.

A FESTIVAL IS MUCH MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS. IT RELIES ON A SPECIAL FORM OF SYNERGY IN WHICH THE NATURE OF THE PROGRAM, REINFORCES OR REFLECTS THE UNIQUENESS OF ITS SETTING. IT IS SIMULTANEOUSLY DEFINED BY AN ELUSIVE MIXTURE OF ARTISTIC RARITY AND URBAN SPECIFICITY.

AND, IF THE TRUE NATURE OF A FESTIVAL IS SYNERGISTIC, IT IS ALSO TO BE FOUND IN THE DIVERSITY OF ITS COMPONENT PARTS. THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING INCONGRUOUS AND DELIBERATELY DARING ABOUT THE COMBINATION OF EVENTS THAT TOGETHER CONSTITUTE A FESTIVAL.

IT MUST ALSO BE A WAY OF RE-ENGAGING WITH FAMILIAR PLACES IN FORGOTTEN WAYS. IN AN AGE OF CARS AND JETS, THIS IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT.

THE FESTIVAL SPACE SHOULD NOT BE CLUTTERED NOR WEDGED UNEASILY BETWEEN BALANCE SHEETS AND BEDTIME. IT SHOULD WEAVE A SPELL THAT STANDS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE SAMENESS OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

IDEALLY THE FESTIVAL IS A PERAMBULATORY ENVIRONMENT. AND HOWEVER HEADY OR FRENETIC THE CALENDAR OF THE EVENT MAY BECOME, IT IS ALWAYS TAKEN AT A HUMAN PACE. BY INSISTING ON THE HUMBLE ACT OF WALKING BETWEEN VENUES, WE ARE FORCED TO RECONNECT WITH FAMILIAR LOCATIONS, ROADS, PAVEMENTS, BUILDINGS, GARDENS, SQUARES, CHURCHES, HALLS, ALL MANNER OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES; FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS WHICH WE WHIZ PAST AND TOO OFTEN TAKE FOR GRANTED, OR EXPERIENCE FLEETINGLY THROUGH A GLANCE FROM A CAR, BUS, TRAIN OR PLAN WINDOW BECOME TRANSFORMED INTO MOMENTS OF GREAT INTIMACY.

IN OTHER TIMES, LESS MATERIALLY FORTUNATE OR OBSESSED THAN OUR OWN, FESTIVALS WERE CRUCIAL MOMENTS OF SOCIAL COHESION.

TRADITIONAL TRIBAL COMMUNITIES WOULD OFTEN HOARD A WHOLE YEAR'S FOOD, ONLY TO DEVOUR IT ALL, IN A SINGLE ORGY OF FEASTING, DANCE, MUSIC, POETRY AND DRAMA. GIVEN THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF EXISTENCE OF THESE COMMUNITIES, THIS REALLY WAS AN EXTREME FORM OF FESTIVITY.

IN SUCH SOCIETIES FESTIVALS WERE EXPRESSIONS OF THE BASIC RITUALS OF A COMMUNITY; WHETHER THEY BE SEASONAL OR PERSONAL; THE CYCLE OF LIFE OR OF A LIFE; THE RITES OF SPRING OR THE RITES OF PASSAGE.

FOR OTHER SOCIETIES, THE FESTIVAL WAS A FORM OF SOCIAL PRESSURE RELEASE.

CELEBRATIONS SUCH AS MARDI GRAS OR BOXING DAY BEING THE ONE TIME OF THE YEAR WHEN STRICT SOCIAL MORES WERE RELAXED OR EVEN REVERSED, WITH, IN THE CASE OF MARDI GRAS MEN DRESSING AS WOMEN AND VICE VERSA OR AS WITH BOXING DAY, THE RICH AND POWERFUL WAITING ON, ATTENDING TO AND SERVING THEIR OWN SERVANTS,

SOME FESTIVALS HAVE DEVELOPED FOR SPECIFIC RELIGIOUS PURPOSES. GREAT PILGRIMAGES SUCH AS THOSE TO MECCA, THE SOURCE OF GANGES OR SANTIAGO DI COMPOSTELA IN SPAIN, HAVE FESTIVALS ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR PARTICULAR JOURNEYS WHICH CAN BE EXPERIENCED THROUGH THE MUSIC AND POETRY CONNECTED WITH EACH STAGE OF THE VOYAGE.

THE FESTIVAL THUS BECOMES ENSHRINED WITHIN THE NARRATIVE OF THE RITUAL AS EACH PART OF THE PILGRIMAGE UNFOLDS.

FESTIVALS WERE ALSO AN INTRINSIC PART OF THE GREAT SPORTING CONTESTS IN CLASSICAL GREECE AND ROME. THE ANCIENT OLYMPIC GAMES WERE AS MUCH COMPETITIONS AMONG EPIC POETS AND SINGERS AS THEY WERE AMONGST ATHLETES.

MORE RECENTLY, FESTIVALS HAVE BECOME GATHERINGS OF LIKE-MINDED ENTHUSIASTS – BIRDS OF A FEATHER, FLOCKING TOGETHER. THEY USUALLY CONCENTRATE ON A PARTICULAR ARTISTIC GENRE SUCH AS FILM, LITERATURE, OPERA, DANCE, MUSIC OR EVEN JAZZ. (ALTHOUGH THEY CAN BE AS BROAD AS ENCOMPASSING ALL THE PERFORMING ARTS).

THESE TYPES OF FESTIVALS HAVE GROWN OUT OF THE LEISURE ACTIVITIES AND HEDONISTIC HABITS OF THE BOURGEOIS, SINCE THE MIDDLE OF THE 18TH CENTURY. THEIR ANTECEDENTS ARE AS DIVERSE AS THE PROMENADE CONCERTS HELD IN THE VAUXHALL GARDENS IN LONDON AND THE CELEBRATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE GREAT EXHIBITIONS OF THE VICTORIAN ERA.

THESE KINDS OF FESTIVALS CAN BE EXPERIENCED IN BAYREUTH OR WEXFORD, AVIGNON OR SALZBURG, MONTPELLIER, MONTREUX OR MELBOURNE, CANNES OR VENICE, HAY-ON-WYE OR TORONTO, SPOLETTO OR CHARLESTON AS WELL AS, OR PERHAPS ONE SHOULD SAY, MOST ESPECIALLY, IN EDINBURGH.

THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL IS VERY MUCH AN EVENT IN THIS MOULD. IN FACT IT HELPED DEFINE THE MOULD ITSELF.

THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL WAS FOUNDED IN 1947. IT OWES ITS ORIGINS TO THE URGENT IMPERATIVE TO REBUILD A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN A CONTINENT THAT HAD BEEN TORN APART BY THE TRAGEDY OF WORLD WAR II, TO RESTORE FAITH, TO ATTEMPT TO PICK UP THE FRAGMENTS OF A CIVILISATION SHAKEN TO ITS CORE BY THE ATROCITIES OF LENINGRAD OR AUSCHWITZ.

IN THE WORDS OF JOHN FALCONER, LORD PROVOST OF THE TIME, IT WAS TO BE A FESTIVAL WHOSE AMBITION WAS TO "EMBRACE THE WORLD".

SUCH SENTIMENTS WERE PARTICULARLY POIGNANT IN 1947. HERE WAS TO BE FOUND A GENUINE REACTION TO THE INSANITY OF THE EXTERMINATIONS OF THE HOLOCAUST.

THE WORDS OF GEORGE STEINER, DELIVERING THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL ORATION IN 1997 AS PART OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FESTIVAL ARE PARTICULARLY APT.

HE SAID; " THE BEARING OF THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL IS SIMPLY THIS. ITS PROUD AND JOYOUS IMAGE OF AN EDINBURGH IN EUROPE, OF THE FESTIVAL AS AN ENACTMENT OF EUROPEAN COMMUNION . . . LOOKED TO AN ECLIPSE OF TRIBALISM, OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE, OF BRUTE POWER-RELATIONS. THIS FORESIGHT OF HOPE HAD, AFTER EUROPE'S NEAR SELF-SLAUGHTER, EVERY RATIONAL LEGITIMACY."

STEINER GOES TO THE HEART OF WHAT MAKES THIS PARTICULAR FESTIVAL SO SPECIAL, INDEED FAR BEYOND MERELY SPECIAL, WHAT MAKES IT VITAL, ALMOST AN IMPERATIVE.

DESPITE SUCH LOFTY AMBITIONS. IT NEARLY DIDN'T HAPPEN. AND TO THIS DAY IT REMAINS A FRAGILE ENTITY.

LEGEND HAS IT, THAT, WERE IT NOT FOR THE GENEROSITY OF THE EARL OF ROSEBERY, AND THE FACT THAT ONE OF HIS THOROUGHbred HORSES WON THE DERBY THAT YEAR, THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL MIGHT NEVER HAVE BEEN STARTED.

THANK GOODNESS IT WAS.

EDINBURGH IS AN IDEAL SETTING FOR A SUMMER ARTS FESTIVAL. IT HAS STEADILY GROWN INTO THE LARGEST CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS IN THE WORLD.

EARLY COLLABORATIONS WITH BRUNO WALTER, THOMAS BEECHAM AND JOHN BARBIROLI; CHAMBER MUSIC FROM ARTUR SCHNABEL, JOSEPH SZIGETI, PIERRE FOURNIER AND WILLIAM PRIMROSE; THE LEGENDARY STAGING OF THE THRIE ESTAITES BY TYRONE GUTHRIE; AS WELL AS ARTISTIC TRIUMPHS TINGED WITH TRAGEDY FROM KATHLEEN FERRIER, AND FINAL CONCERTS BY FRITZ WUNDERLICH AND DENIS BRAIN; ALL HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE MYSTIQUE WHICH THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL ENJOYS TO THIS DAY.

THERE ARE NOW 8 FESTIVALS HELD IN EDINBURGH IN AUGUST. THEY ARE THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL, THE EDINBURGH MILITARY TATTOO, THE EDINBURGH FRINGE, THE BOOK, THE FILM, THE JAZZ AND TELEVISION FESTIVALS; THE MOST RECENT ADDITION TO THE FAMILY BEING A FESTIVAL OF POLITICS.

THIS YEAR BETWEEN THEM THE EDINBURGH FESTIVALS ISSUED OVER 2.5 MILLION TICKETS WITH A TOTAL REVENUE IN EXCESS OF £30 MILLION OR USD60 MILLION.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF EDINBURGH'S FESTIVALS INCLUDING HOGMANY AND THE OTHER WINTER FESTIVALS IS SAID TO BE IN THE ORDER OF £185 MILLION OR USD370 MILLION.

IT IS NOW BIG BUSINESS.

ALL HAVE EVOLVED FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATION STARTED BY RUDY BING, H HARVEY WOOD, LADY ROSEBERY AND OTHERS IN 1947.

ARTISTS THE WORLD OVER, OWE A GREAT DEBT TO LORD ROSEBERY AND HIS HORSE.

TO THEIR DETRACTORS, SUCH FESTIVALS RUN THE RISK OF BECOMING TOO BIG, TOO IMPERSONAL, OF BECOMING ANAEMIC CONVEYOR BELTS OF INTERNATIONAL CONSUMERISM.

THE DANGER IS GENUINE.

THE ARTISTIC AS WELL AS POLITICAL CONTEXT OF CREATING A FESTIVAL IN 2007 IS FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVAILING ATTITUDES IN 1947.

IN 1947 EDINBURGH HAD THE FESTIVAL SCENE TO ITSELF. THERE WAS ALMOST NO COMPETITION. SALZBURG WAS STILL TAINTED WITH A CONNECTION TO FASCISM AND THE ONLY OTHER SERIOUS EVENTS, AVIGNON AND AIX, WERE IN SIMILAR NASCENT STAGES OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT.

AND AS I HAVE EMPHASISED PREVIOUSLY, BECAUSE THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL WAS FOUNDED FOR THE VERY BEST OF REASONS, THE GREATEST ARTISTS AND PERFORMERS FLOCKED TO IT. IT BECAME A SORT OF SECULAR PILGRIMAGE.

WHILE THE REPUTATION OF THE FESTIVAL AND THE DECADES OF GOODWILL IT HAS BUILT UP ARE ENORMOUS ASSETS, WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHICH IS EXTREMELY FICKLE.

PERHAPS THE MOST SINCERE COMPLIMENT THAT THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL HAS RECEIVED OVER THE YEARS IS THE FACT THAT IT HAS BEEN COPIED ALMOST EVERYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD. FESTIVALS AS FAR AWAY AS SYDNEY AND SINGAPORE OWE THEIR EXISTENCE TO THE MODEL DEVELOPED IN EDINBURGH.

OCCUPYING THIS JOB FOR JUST OVER A YEAR, I CAN ATTEST TO THE VERACITY OF THIS STATEMENT. I TOO FEEL VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES OF THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL. THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH I HAVE DONE THIS JOB BEFORE - EXCEPT THAT IT WAS IN MELBOURNE. MY ROLE AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS WAS PERHAPS THE ULTIMATE OUT-OF-TOWN, TRY-OUT!

AS A NEWCOMER TO EDINBURGH, I HAVE BEEN DILIGENT IN MY EFFORTS TO REFLECT HOW LUCKY THE REST OF THE WORLD THINKS SCOTLAND IS TO HAVE THIS WONDERFUL COLLECTION OF FESTIVALS. IF IMITATION IS THE MOST SINCERE FORM OF FLATTERY, IT IS ALSO THE MOST HARD HEADED ANALYSIS OF AN ENVIABLE CIVIC ASSET.

ONE OF THE OFT REPEATED LOCAL CRITICISMS ABOUT THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL IS AIMED AT THE VERY TITLE OF THE EVENT. THERE ARE MANY, MANY PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND WHO ARGUE THAT THE WORD *INTERNATIONAL* IN OUR TITLE IS REDUNDANT IF NOT EMBARRASSING.

THEIR DISAPPROVAL STEMS FROM A PERCEPTION OF CULTURAL CRINGE. WHY DOES AN INSTITUTION WITH SUCH AN ENVIABLE REPUTATION, A FESTIVAL THAT HAS ACHIEVED SO MUCH, CONTINUE TO HAVE SUCH A POMPOUS SOUNDING TITLE?

I HAVE NO INTENTION OF CHANGING OUR NAME. I THINK IT ACCURATELY REFLECTS OUR PURPOSE AND OUR PHILOSOPHY

A HIGHLIGHT OF THE VERY FIRST EDINBURGH *INTERNATIONAL* FESTIVAL WAS THE APPEARANCE OF THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA WITH BRUNO WALTER. BARELY 2 YEARS EARLIER, THE MEMBERS OF THAT ORCHESTRA WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED ENEMY ALIENS AND WOULD MOST PROBABLY HAVE RECEIVED A VERY DIFFERENT RECEPTION FROM THE RAPTUROUS APPLAUSE AND STANDING-OVATIONS WITNESSED IN THE USHER HALL.

EDINBURGH BEGAN QUITE DELIBERATELY AS AN *INTERNATIONAL* FESTIVAL, THAT IS, AN OCCASION FOR THE GREATEST VIRTUOSI FROM MANY DIFFERENT CULTURES TO COME TOGETHER TO COLLABORATE ON CONCERTS, PLAYS, EXHIBITIONS AND SPECTACLES. IT DID SO AT A TIME WHEN SHARED VALUES OR A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES COULD NOT BE ASSUMED TO EXIST.

IT IS BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF THE ARTS TO COMMUNICATE BEYOND POLITICS, ECONOMICS AND EVEN LANGUAGE, THAT I BELIEVE IN THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS.

WHILE THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE IS NOT ENGAGED IN AN HORIFIC WORLD WIDE WAR, NEITHER IS IT EXACTLY HARMONIOUS.

THE SHAMBLES IN IRAQ OR THE ETHNIC CLEANSING IN THE BALKANS IN THE 1990s ONLY SERVE TO DEMONSTRATE THE FRAGILITY OF OUR EXISTENCE. AND IN A QUITE DIRECT LINAGE TO THE ORIGINS OF MY OWN FESTIVAL IN EDINBURGH, THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL IS AS IMPORTANT TODAY AS IT EVER WAS.

NOR SHOULD I GET CARRIED AWAY WITH MY OWN ARGUMENT HERE. THIS IS NOT A DISCUSSION THAT SHOULD RELY ON THE CLICHES OF SOFT POWER FOR ITS CONTINUED RELEVANCE.

WHATEVER THE ORIGINAL INSPIRATION BEHIND THE FOUNDING OF THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL IN 1947 (AND IF I AM BEING ENTIRELY HONEST, THAT IMPETUS WAS BOTH COMMERCIAL – IN TERMS OF ATTRACTING TOURISM – AS WELL AS BEING IDEALISTIC), FESTIVALS ARE NOT JUST ABOUT DISCOVERING A LOST SENSE OF COMMUNAL PURPOSE.

FESTIVALS ARE IMPORTANT IN AND OF THEMSELVES.

AND INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS HAVE A SPECIAL ROLE IN OFFERING INSIGHTS INTO THE IDEAS, ATTITUDES, LANGUAGES, CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS OF PEOPLE FROM CULTURES BOTH CLOSE TO AND REMOTE FROM OUR OWN.

THEY CHALLENGE OUR FRAME OF REFERENCE.

I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN ONLY EARN ANY GENUINE RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING FROM OUR AUDIENCES AS A RESULT OF THE OPPORTUNITIES WHICH FLOW FROM THEM BEING EXPOSED TO PERFORMANCES FROM MANY DIFFERENT CULTURES.

ABOVE ALL WE MUST HAVE THE COURAGE TO DEVISE PROGRAMS THAT ARE NOT A FACILE RESPONSE TO THE LATEST FASHION.

IN A WORLD WHICH IS INCREASINGLY SUBJECTED TO AUDITS OF EVERY KIND, WHERE EVERYTHING MUST BE ENDLESSLY MEASURED, FESTIVALS ARE ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING ENTITIES IN THE ARTISTIC SECTOR WHICH CAN TAKE SUBSTANTIAL RISKS.

AS MUCH AS WHAT WE DO REFLECTS THE IMAGINATION OF THE ARTIST, IT MUST ALSO HAVE FAITH IN THE IMAGINATION OF THE AUDIENCE.

IN AN ERA OF DISPOSABLE CULTURE, A FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENT TO THE IMAGINATION OF THE AUDIENCE REQUIRES PATIENCE AND DETERMINATION.

IN CONSIDERING THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY, FESTIVALS MUST REALISE THAT THEY CAN HAVE AN IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION AT A TIME WHEN THE EXCESSES OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND POST-MODERNITY HAVE TAKEN THEIR TOLL ON BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF ART AND ITS HISTORY.

AS FESTIVAL DIRECTORS WE MUST CONSTANTLY TEST, EVEN CONTEST AND REFINE A DEFINITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ITSELF. OUR UNDERSTANDING OF OUR ROLE SHOULD NEVER BE STATIC OR NOSTALGIC; IT SHOULD REFLECT THE EVER-CHANGING WORLD IN WHICH WE PRACTICE.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INNOVATIONS IN THE LAST 20 YEARS. I WOULD SAY WITHOUT HESITATION THE INVENTION OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB, THE MAPPING OF THE HUMAN GENOME, A RECOGNITION OF WIDESPREAD ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE POWERFUL ECONOMIES OF CHINA AND INDIA.

LET US FOCUS FOR A MOMENT ON ECONOMICS.

THE AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT ECONOMIST RICHARD FLORIDA HAS WRITTEN ABOUT SOME OF THE EMERGING ECONOMIC SHIFTS AND TRENDS IN A GLOBALISED WORLD. IN HIS BOOK *THE RISE OF THE CREATIVE CLASS* HE DESCRIBES THE FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS TO THE ECONOMIES OF ALL COMMUNITIES LARGE OR SMALL, CITIES OR COUNTRIES, CORPORATIONS OR CO-OPERATIVES.

HE FURTHER DESCRIBES THE INTENSE COMPETITION THAT IS STARTING TO OCCUR, ESPECIALLY AMONGST CITIES IN DEVELOPED NATIONS TO ATTRACT THESE INDIVIDUAL DESIGNERS, ARCHITECTS, BIO-TECHNICIANS, SOFTWARE ENGINEERS, ARTISTS OR ENTREPRENEURS TO EITHER LOCATE, OR RELOCATE THEMSELVES IN A GIVEN PLACE.

RICHARD FLORIDA'S ARGUMENT IS NOT LINEAR OR LITERAL. HE INSISTS THAT A BROADLY BASED, LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO CREATIVITY IN ALL ITS FORMS, EXPRESSED BY ENLIGHTENED AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INVESTMENT INCENTIVES WILL REAP ENORMOUS BENEFITS FOR LOCAL ECONOMIES.

ONE NEED LOOK NO FURTHER THAN BILBAO TO SEE THESE IDEAS IN ACTION. SINCE THE COMPLETION OF FRANK GEHRY'S INTRIGUINGLY IRREGULAR TITANIUM EDIFICE FOR THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, BILBAO HAS BECOME A MODEL OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY.

FLORIDA EMPHASISES THAT THIS IS NOT MERELY A DIALOGUE ABOUT ARCHITECTURE OR INFRASTRUCTURE. THIS IS NOT AN ARGUMENT ABOUT BUILDINGS, RATHER IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE.

AND WHAT ARE FESTIVALS IF NOT AN EXPRESSION OF THE SHARED AMBITIONS OF A COMMUNITY? SURELY WHAT WE DO IS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE.

IN POINTING TO SOME OF THE PROFOUND CHANGES IN THE WORLD IN THE LAST DECADE OR TWO, I AM NOT SUGGESTING THAT ALL OF A SUDDEN, WHAT WE DO SHOULD FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS OR GENETICS; ON COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN BIOLOGISTS AND COMPUTER ANIMATORS, OR THE COMMISSIONING OF OPERAS ABOUT BEN NEVIS

WHAT I AM HOWEVER SAYING IS THAT OUR PROGRAMMES SHOULD REFLECT A SENSE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE LIVE.

THE PHYSICAL AS WELL AS THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF EUROPE IN 1947 WAS RATHER SOLITARY IF NOT DOWNRIGHT BLEAK. FUEL SHORTAGES WERE A FACT OF EVERY DAY LIFE. FOOD RATIONING WAS STILL IN FORCE. MY FATHER RECALLS DRIVING FROM ROME TO PARIS THAT YEAR AND PASSING PERHAPS NO MORE THAN A COUPLE OF HUNDRED CARS ALONG THE WAY.

THE GREAT IMPERATIVE OF THAT TIME WAS TO ENGAGE WITH THE BROAD CONVERSATION ABOUT THE EVER-EVOLVING EXPERIMENT OF EUROPEAN STATEHOOD.

IF IT IS TO CONTINUE TO PROSPER AND REMAIN RELEVANT, THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL MUST TAKE ACCOUNT OF SO MUCH MORE THAN A STRONG SENSE OF EUROPEAN HERITAGE.

THESE ARE EXCITING TIMES.

WHEN I FIRST VISITED SHANGHAI OVER 25 YEARS AGO, PUDONG WAS A SERIES OF MARKET GARDENS. TODAY IT IS A THRIVING FUTURISTIC METROPOLIS; A COSMOPOLITAN, CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL CENTRE. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST VIBRANT CITIES IN THE WORLD.

I BELIEVE MY CHALLENGE IN EDINBURGH IS NOT SIMPLY TO INCLUDE WORK FROM MANY DIFFERENT CULTURES IN MY FESTIVAL PROGRAMMES. I BELIEVE THAT THE EMPHASIS OF THE PROGRAMME SHOULD SHIFT (BY HOW MUCH IS NOT YET CLEAR).

MOST OF ALL IT SHOULD TAKE GREATER ACCOUNT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY CULTURAL VIBRANCY TO BE FOUND IN THIS REGION; NOT JUST CHINA BUT JAPAN, KOREA, VIETNAM, INDONESIA, CAMBODIA, THAILAND AND OF COURSE INDIA.

IF OURS IS AN INFORMATION AGE, I ALSO THINK IT IS A TIME (TO DELIBERATELY MIX THE METAPHOR) IN WHICH WE LIVE IN PARALLEL UNIVERSES. A TIME WHEN NO SINGLE CULTURE HAS THE OVERWHELMING RIGHT OF SUPERIORITY, MORAL, SPIRITUAL, ETHICAL OR TECHNOLOGICAL.

IF THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL IS AN ORGANISATION, WHICH BY ITS HISTORY HAS FOCUSED ON CLASSICAL TRADITIONS, THEN WE SHOULD DO MORE TO REFLECT THE MANY SUCH CLASSICAL REPERTOIRES THAT ARE TO BE FOUND IN CULTURES AS DIVERSE AS LEBANON, TURKEY, IRAN, KOREA, INDIA, PAKISTAN AND CHINA.

HERE ARE A COUPLE OF PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF WHAT I MEAN.

THE TURKISH COMPOSER ITRI WAS A CONTEMPORARY OF J S BACH.
WHY NOT PRESENT A CONCERT IN WHICH THEIR VERY DIFFERENT BUT
CONTEMPORANEOUS SOUND WORLDS COULD MINGLE?

OR, AS MY COLLEAGUE GOH CHING LEE FROM THE SINGAPORE
FESTIVAL BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION, TANG XIANZU, THE AUTHOR
OF THE PEONY PAVILION AND SHAKESPEARE BOTH DIED IN 1616.

SURELY SUCH A FACT IS THE BASIS FOR A HUGE RANGE OF POTENTIAL
PROJECTS.

SO WHAT FINALLY AM I TRYING TO SAY?

A FESTIVAL IS A GIFT. A GIFT FROM A COMMUNITY, OR A CITY TO
ITSELF; TO ITS CITIZENS, TO ITS VERY SOUL.

THOSE OF US ENTRUSTED TO DETERMINE THE NATURE AND SHAPE OF
THAT GIFT, TO NUTURE IT AND GIVE IT FORM, WE HAVE A SPECIAL
OBLIGATION TO BE GENEROUS AND OPEN-SPIRITED.

I BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL PARTS OF MY JOB
AS A FESTIVAL DIRECTOR IS TO CONTINUALLY CHALLENGE THE
ASSUMPTIONS I MAKE ABOUT OTHER CULTURES; AND TO EXAMINE
THE LIMITATIONS OF MY OWN FRAME OF REFERENCE.

MAKING THE JOURNEY TODAY FROM EDINBURGH TO SHANGHAI, I
HOPE IS THE MOST ELOQUENT STATEMENT I CAN POSSIBLY MAKE
ABOUT BOTH MY INTENTIONS AND MY ASPIRATIONS.