

Acceptance Speech by KIM Yun-Cheol

Reaching Out Is Urgent!!

I am very honored to accept the presidency of I.A.T.C. for the next two years. I thank you all for electing me President of this important international organization. I think I know what you are expecting from me, the first Asian president in the history of the I.A.T.C.

Many things have changed in my life since I first participated in the I.A.T.C. congress in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1994: my hair has turned from young black to mature black; my accent in English has changed from American to International; and the demographics of my friends has come to be dominated by international colleagues. One thing, however, has never changed: my passion for the theatre, for theatre criticism, and for I.A.T.C. And I think this is the case for most of us here. With our ever-increasing love of theatre, criticism, and this association, I would like to work with you, first and foremost, to make theatre criticism as vital as it used to be, not only in theatre communities but also in society. **How shall we do this? Let me cover three of the dynamic courses we can follow:**

In the first place, we need to reach out to theatre practitioners, audiences, and general readers, whom we have somewhat isolated from our inner circles of critical discourse with a communication-unfriendly writing style, particularly since we were inundated with, and fascinated by, post-modern cultural theories. I firmly believe that the most important function of theatre criticism is—and should remain—to generate interest in the theatre arts in society. And that interest cannot be generated by our inaccessibly esoteric, equivocating critical language. Interest can be aroused only through interesting writing—and by “interesting” I mean: 1) the criticism that is practiced is accessible; 2) the criticism has academic depth in its analysis and reading; 3) the criticism has literary value in itself, in both style and creativity; and 4) the criticism conveys our whole theatre experience and connects it to our daily lives. With all these in mind, I promise to continue Ian Herbert’s excellent initiatives to seek more and more ways to ensure that theatre and theatre criticism thrive to their fullest extent.

Secondly, along with reaching out, we must at last bring Asia fully into the fold. As you know, Asia has become the focus of contemporary world politics, economy, and culture. Ironically, however, at the same time Asian theatre remains only a traditional theatre in the minds of many Westerners. Generally speaking, in spite of all efforts, a kind of mitigated orientalism still lives in the Western intellectual’s awareness. We theatre critics, occidental or oriental, should be among the most

willing to overcome this intellectual blind spot, and to promote mutual understanding. I will do my best to encourage and enhance that understanding. And I think I can do that, as someone on the border between an Asian heritage and Western theatre studies. Commuting, as it were, between my received heritage and my chosen field, I have developed over time a “third culture” identity that belongs to neither the West nor the East exclusively, but is instead just in-between. So I am in a good position to build bridges between the West and Asia. I will try hard, with the collaboration from the other Asian colleagues in the association, to bring more of you to Asia and to Asian theatre, and bring more Asian theatre to the West in various ways, such as through critical discourse, theatrical performances and cultural projects. Very happily, we now have the most willing and participatory Asian group in our Association’s entire history. China and India have newly joined us, and we have already long been enjoying the good company of Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea—and also Iran and Turkey, if these last two sections feel that they belong to Asia not only geopolitically, but culturally as well. We can feel fortunate and encouraged that the I.A.T.C. Asian Group was established during our Seoul Extraordinary Congress in 2006, and that we had our first colloquium just four months ago in Beijing. Along with our Asian members, I will commit myself to reaching out to the West. Hopefully, during my presidency there will be more seminars, colloquia, conferences and festivals in Asia for [all of you to join](#).

[Finally, in addition to reaching out to audiences and to Asia, we need to reach out to each other in I.A.T.C.](#) I firmly believe that the newly elected executive committee members will be ever more dedicated to moving our Association forward; I ask all the national sections, present or absent here, to be just as dedicated. You can be sure that I am a good listener. This interaction between the executive committee and the national sections is by far the most crucial mechanism for our vigorous survival. I will be looking forward to your suggestions, opinions, even criticisms, 24 hours a day, 365 days in a year. You will be heard, responded to, with sincerity and an open heart.

“Change” and “hope” are the two themes of the day. An Asian presidency is obviously a momentous change, and one that you have carefully considered. And I do hope I will be able to translate that change into hope. I will reach out to you, and you to me. Together let us reach out to the world, to practitioners and readers, by generating the general public’s interest in the theatre. Let us not forget that we theatre critics are missionaries of the theatre in a theatrical no man’s land. Thank you.