

2026 NTU International Theatre Conference

Liveness/ Presence: Theatre's Past, Present, and Future

Call for Papers

What distinguishes theatre as an art form? In an era dominated by streaming platforms and an increasingly competitive entertainment industry, this question has become a pressing and shared concern for theatre practitioners and scholars alike.

A space in which a person walks across while someone else watches can become theatre; the co-presence of performers and spectators seems to function as a necessary condition of the theatrical event. Space, performers, and audiences together form theatre's foundational triad, upon which further dramatic elements such as plot, character, thought, language, music and spectacle are developed and incorporated.

Liveness/presence has long been regarded as the foundational and defining appeal of theatrical art, referring to an interpersonal and affective experience grounded in the condition of the "here and now." However, this discourse, which emphasizes theatre's ephemerality and irreproducibility as its core aesthetic value, has been questioned with the advent of recording and live-streaming technologies. Likewise, theories that foreground the energetic feedback loop generated by the physical co-presence of performers and spectators have been challenged by the emergence of online–offline interactions and telepresent forms of remote co-performance.

At the same time, contemporary theatre has reexamined the centrality of narrative and text, moving toward forms co-constituted through sound, image, bodies, materials, and other elements. These developments prompt a renewed inquiry into how dramatic traditions across cultures have negotiated the relations among text, action, performance, and spectatorship. This, in turn, invites further questions: How have theatres in different historical periods connected with their societies and articulated their distinctive aesthetic forms? How do bodies, spaces, texts, and stage effects shape spectators' modes of perception? When immediate affective exchange between performers and audiences is no longer bound by physical proximity, does *presence* still retain its central significance? And where might theatre be heading next?

Accordingly, this conference invites scholars and artists from Taiwan and abroad to reflect on **the past, present, and future of theatre** from diverse perspectives, including historical

research, textual analysis, theoretical inquiry, and contemporary performance practice. We welcome submissions on the following themes (including but not limited to):

- The past, present, and future of theatrical aesthetics
- Theatre as a cultural phenomenon and its relationship to everyday life
- Narrative and non-narrative forms in theatre
- Spectatorship, performativity, and lived experience in classical and contemporary theatre
- The institutionalization, regulation, and aestheticization of actors' body training
- Scenography, design practices, and media technology in theatre
- The circulation, transmission, and transformation of dramatic texts and performances across borders and disciplines
- Theatre performance, theatre industries, and theatre education in response to the impact of emerging technologies
- New perspectives on methodologies and theories in theatre and drama studies

Conference Dates: October 17–18, 2026

Venue: National Taiwan University

Organizer: Department of Drama and Theatre, National Taiwan University

Abstract Submission Deadline: February 28, 2026

Submissions should include the following materials:

1. Paper title
2. An abstract in either Chinese (up to 500 words) or English (up to 300 words)
3. A brief biographical note (within 100 words)
4. Contact email address

Please submit your abstract and biographical note as email attachments to the conference submission address: ntutheatre2026@gmail.com

Notification of abstract review results will be emailed by mid-March 2026.

Conference Chair: Hsiao-Mei Hsieh

Contact Person: I-Chen Lo