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Exploring theater experiences among Hong Kong audiences

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Abstract: Audience experience is a bridge between performers and the audience in the performing arts. In this study, we explore how Chinese audiences evaluate a theater performance in Hong Kong. We interviewed 45 professional theater practitioners and identified five theater experience factors. We found that the audience evaluates a theater performance from the perspectives of cognition, emotion, sensation, authenticity, and coherence. Cognition is the extent to which a performance is comprehensible yet provides cognitive challenges and inspiration. Emotion is the experience of engagement, emotional release and resonance, and surprise. Sensation concerns physiological and sensory stimulations and experiencing aesthetic pleasure. Authenticity is the extent to which performers are believed to be sincere and true in staging and performing the play. Coherence is about ensemble and integration between different theatrical elements. Similarities and differences with other audience experience models proposed are noted and discussed.

Subjects: Social Psychology; Practice & Practitioners; Drama

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper identifies five experience factors how Hong Kong theater practitioners appreciate a theater performance, namely cognition, emotion, sensation, authenticity, and coherence. Cognition is the extent to which a performance is comprehensible yet provides cognitive challenges and inspiration. Emotion is the experience of engagement, emotional release and resonance, and surprise. Sensation concerns physiological and sensory stimulations and experiencing aesthetic pleasure. Authenticity is the extent to which performers are believed to be sincere and true in staging and performing the play. Coherence is about ensemble and integration between different theatrical elements. Review of post-performance comments written by the general audience also confirms the importance of these five factors. These five factors provide practitioners a systematic and comprehensive understanding of how their work is being perceived and benefits the audience. Knowing what the audience like and dislike could also help theater practitioners build and develop audience by directing audience to plays suiting their preferences and guiding audience on how to derive appreciation from seeing a play.

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1. Introduction

Audience experience is a bridge between performers and the audience in the performing arts. Theoretically, it is important to understand how audience experiences are structured. Being able to pinpoint the components by which the audience structure their experiences is fundamental to the exploration of the antecedents to audience experiences, e.g., what factors determine each aspect of the audience experience, and the consequence of audience experiences, e.g., which aspects of audience experience contribute to personal growth or re-consumption behaviors. Practically, a theatrical experience framework should also help performers to understand audience reactions in a more systematic manner. Eversmann clearly puts that Understanding the underlying structure of theatrical experiences in order to understand what the audience like and dislike is also about formulating a recipe to produce the most enjoyable theatrical performance. Listening to the audience also does not imply an artistic compromise that artists are producing work simply to sell tickets. Kosidowski sees that artists could and should balance between artistic and community needs in order to produce "great theater that a community will want to see" (85). Stylistically different performances could evoke equivocal fascinating or disappointing experiences. There are immense individual differences in the experience of a theatrical work. While perceptions of a performance, as to its *content*, could differ among people—how these perceptions are associated with each other, as to their *structure*, could be the same among different audiences. Various audience experience models have been proposed by researchers and performing arts organizations in Australia, Germany, the UK, and the USA. Most of these models address the performing arts in general. In this study, we explored the factors how Chinese audiences experience a theater performance in Hong Kong. It is an open question whether Chinese theater audiences experience theater performances the same way as westerners do. There is an impression that Chinese theater could be very different from Western theater. However, the kind of "theater" as focused here is often considered a western phenomenon which could be traced to the Greek tradition. Indeed, Mackerras notes that there are notwithstanding many similarities between western drama and classical Chinese drama that even Brecht and Bentley observed that Brecht's "alienation" in acting has long been utilized in traditional Chinese theater like Kunqu. This study is a modest attempt for theater practitioners and researchers to understand if and how experiences of theater performances are similar or different across cultures, especially in Hong Kong as a place where the East meets the West.

2. Audience experience models

Audience experience models fall into two categories: (a) specific models corresponding to a particular art form, and (b) general models pertaining to arts and culture experiences in general. Specific models are like those of Neelands on theater and that of Boerner and Jobst on opera. These models include some specific elements like stage setting specific to theater and orchestra specific to opera that are not applicable to other art forms. These models excel in providing a comprehensive and detailed analysis of audience experience but make comparison across art forms difficult. General models are like that of Eversmann and that of Foreman-Wernet and Dervin that cover a broad spectrum of arts and culture experiences allowing comparison across art forms. These models tend to have fewer dimensions because some broad generalizations are necessary to edge out the differences among art forms. Note that some models that are developed upon specific art forms, e.g., that of New Economics Foundation and that of Brown and Novak both focusing on theater audiences, could be considered general models too because the dimensions they identify are psychological in nature instead of technical in general that these psychological experiences are applicable across all art forms.

2.1. General models

Eversmann identifies four dimensions of audience experiences: (a) perceptual; (b) emotional; (c) cognitive; and (d) communicative. They are based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 28 experts including critics, theater managers and educators working professionally in the theatrical field. The interviewees were asked to describe memorable performances that made a lasting impression. The perceptual dimension concerns experiences, but not interpretations, of physical stimuli like visual and auditory sensations that include lights, sounds, and movement patterns of a performance. Perceptual elements also include kinetic responses like involuntary mimicry of the facial expressions, bodily postures and movements of the performers. The cognitive dimension deals with comprehension and interpretation of a performance and how the performance relates to oneself or familiar circumstances. The emotional dimension concerns feelings connected with a performance. These could be empathetic feelings as experienced by the fictional characters, *e.g.*, feeling pride when the protagonist succeeds, or feelings towards these fictional characters if we were to encounter them in real life, *e.g.*, feeling angry against a villain. Emotional feelings may also be a flow experience, which Csikszentmihalyi refers to as a fully immersed mental state, that the audience is emotionally being "carried away" by the performance or is having negative feelings like confusion or irritation when he fails to comprehend a performance. The communicative dimension concerns the interaction between the audience and the amalgam of the cognitive, emotional, and perceptual elements in the performance. Performance communications come from not only the performers but also from the theater-makers like directors and playwrights. The performance may also help the audience members to communicate with themselves individually as engaging in internal reflections or to communicate with each other as engaging in dialogues or debates with other audience members. Boerner et al. attempted to validate Eversmann's four-factor framework. Because of a limited sample size, they could evaluate only the components separately and they reported that each component was uni-dimensional. They found that the cognitive dimension and the emotional dimension were significant predictors of the overall judgment of a performance whereas the perception and communication dimensions were not.

The New Economics Foundation (NEF) developed an audience experience framework through online surveys of 2,500 theater-goers and interviews with theater professionals. They identified five dimensions of audience experience: (a) *engagement and concentration* is the extent to which a performance captures and maintains the audience's attention; (b) *learning and challenge* concerns whether the theater experience is intrinsically rewarding without being "too easy" or "too hard"; (c) *energy and tension* refers to physiological reactions to a performance; (d) *shared experience and atmosphere* is the sense of the collective experience afforded by a good performance; and (e) *personal resonance and emotional connection* refers to the experience of a personal connection with the narrative unfolding on stage and the extent to which the theater can function as a way of broadening people's understanding.

Brown and Novak surveyed 2,000 theater-goers in 19 performances. They identified six intrinsic impact constructs that the audiences experience, namely: (a) *captivation* that characterizes the degree to which an audience member is engrossed and absorbed in the performance; (b) *intellectual stimulation* that encompasses several aspects of mental engagement, including both personal and social dimensions, which could collectively be characterized as "cognitive traction"; (c) *emotional resonance* that refers to the intensity of the emotional response, the degree of empathy with performers, and the therapeutic value in an emotional sense; (d) *spiritual value* that addresses an aspect of the experience that goes beyond emotional or intellectual engagement and assesses the extent to which an audience member has a transcendent, inspiring, or empowering experience; (e) *aesthetic growth* that characterizes the extent to which an audience member is exposed to a new type or style of art, or is otherwise stretched aesthetically by a performance; and (f) *social bonding* that concerns the extent to which a performance connects an audience member with others, allows one to celebrate one's own cultural heritage or to learn about cultures outside of one's life experience, and leaves one with new insights into human relations.

Foreman-Wernet and Dervin interviewed four informants in-depth by using a sense-making methodology regarding their diverse domains of arts experiences. They found that arts and cultural audience members experience: (a) *spirituality or transcendence*—connecting oneself to something greater than oneself; (b) *captivation*—becoming "lost" in time and place to be totally in the moment as like when one experiences a flow experience; (c) *self-expression*—allowing the audience to express themselves; (d) *self-awareness*—allowing them to develop greater awareness and understanding of themselves; (e) *cognitive or intellectual growth*—prompting thoughts about the world around them; (f) *community or connection*—providing a social bonding opportunity that also enables them to connect with their cultural heritage or community; (g) *well-being*—experiencing pleasure and having a relaxing time; and (h) *social judgment*—engaging themselves in comparing themselves with others and social norms.

Radbourne *et al.* ("The audience experience", "Measuring the intrinsic benefits") conducted focus groups with "subscribers" (audience members who attended performances) and also "non-attenders" (members of the general public who had not attended performances) for different productions of live music or theater performed by different companies at different venues. They identified four components of audience experiences: (a) *knowledge transfer* is the extent to which there is contextual programming, visual enhancements, program information, pre-show or conductor talks or meet-the-director-after-the-show talks; (b) *risk management* is the commitment to managing risk through program knowledge, previews, comfort and accessibility, personalized communication, quality guarantee expectation, and value for money; (c) *authenticity* is the capacity to achieve believability, sincerity, meaning, and the conviction that a performance matches the promotional description and that the performers are personally engaged in a performance; and (d) *collective engagement* is about ensuring that expectations of social contact and inclusion are met, which includes shared experience, social constructs and meaning, common values, live experience, interaction between performers and the audience, and discussion after a performance. A distinctive feature of Radbourne's framework is that it measures both the *satisfaction towards* and the *importance* of these four components.

2.2. Specific models

Neelands defines theater art as "the direct experience that is shared when people imagine and behave as if they were other than themselves in some other place at another time" (4). Through the performers' symbolic and fictional manipulation of human presence, aided by means of speech, gesture, facial expressions, music, costumes, sets, and lighting in space and time (Schonmann, 2007), theatrical meanings are created both for performers and the audience. Based on physical aspects, Boerner showed that a play could be experienced in nine dimensions, namely, *the play topic, stage direction, principal performers, the ensemble, stage setting, music, tangible service quality* supplied by the theater, *emotional reaction* of the audience, and their *identification with the principal performers*. According to Schonmann, these physical or technical properties recreate or imitate reality and entail symbolic meanings to challenge the audience to take action against the abysmal conditions in real life. The interaction of all physical properties thereby elicits a complete set of *audience experiences* which contribute to an evaluation of performance quality, service quality, and consumer satisfaction or enjoyment (Boerner & Jobst, 2008; Boerner, Moser, & Jobst, 2011; Boerner, Neuhoff, Renz, & Moser, 2008; Boerner & Renz, 2008; Holbrook et al., 2006). *Performance quality* is the artistic quality of a performance whereas *consumer satisfaction* is "the audience's judgment that the theatrical event provided a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment" (Boerner & Renz, 2008). *Service quality* is a functional feature that comprises the delivery manner of the service, such as the quality of seats and ushers (Boerner & Renz, 2008).

In a large-scale study, Boerner and Jobst developed a 21-factor theater experience scale with 113 items that was validated with 2,795 audience members viewing 44 performances in 12 German-speaking theaters. Their model addresses not only the theater "viewing" experiences like perceived artistic quality, cognitive responses (*e.g.*, novelty, complexity), emotional responses

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(*e.g.*, empathy, identification), and conative responses (*e.g.*, thought-provoking impulses, animation for information seeking), but also mood, pre-information, expectations, evaluation of theater organization, and "visiting" experiences like other audience's behavior and the servicescape (*e.g.*, catering, seat comfort).

3. Current study

In this study, we explored how Chinese audiences experience theater performances in Hong Kong. Although there are already some models on performing arts experiences (*e.g.*, Brown & Novak, 2007; New Economics Foundation, 2008; Radbourne et al., 2009) and also theater experiences in particular (*e.g.*, Boerner and Jobst), these models were developed in western cultures in Australia, Germany, the UK, and the USA, countries in which the theater as performing arts has a long and strong tradition. It is both an empirical and a theoretical question of whether audience experiences are cross-culturally universal at an etic level. This study explored the factors of theater experiences from the perspective of theater experts through in-depth interviews with professional theater practitioners. The results show that theater audience experiences could be classified into five factors, namely, cognition, emotion, sensation, authenticity, and coherence.

4. Method

Our informants were 45 professional theater practitioners. We chose experts instead of laypeople as informants because experts could give differentiated and detailed opinions and are more competent in assessing more performance criteria (Boerner & Renz, 2008). We followed the same criteria used by Boerner and Renz to decide whether a person could be considered an expert: (a) level of theater education and training, and (b) professional experience with the theater. Our sample of 45 theater experts was composed of professional theater practitioners. The 45 theater practitioners had at least five years of professional theater working experience; 35 of them had formal theater training and some even had masters or doctoral degrees. Several practitioners were considered gurus in the Hong Kong theater scene in the sense that they have taken founding or leading roles in major theater companies or training institutions. These experts spanned a variety of primary functional roles including director, playwright, performer, stage designer, and administrator, etc. (see Table 1).

The experts participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted by the same researcher. Each interview lasted for at least one hour. All interviewees consented to have their interviews audiotaped, transcribed, quoted and published anonymously. The interviewees were asked the following questions: (a) describe your most memorable theater performance; (b) describe your most favorable theater performance? Why was it the best? (c) describe your least favorable theater performance? Why was it the worst? (d) compare and contrast different productions based on the same play; and (e) describe what attracts you to the theater as a hobby or a profession and wherein lies the charm of the theater. These questions invite

Table 1. Profile of 45 theater professionals being interviewed			
Sex	**Professional role***	**Professional experience in theater**	**Education**
• Male (33) • Female (12)	• Performer (13) • Director (17) • Administrator (7) • Stage Designer (3) • Playwright (3) • Critic (2)	• Between 6 and 9 years (5) • Between 10 and 19 years (9) • Between 20 and 29 years (20) • 30 or more years (11)	• Formal/tertiary education in theater training (*e.g.*, diploma, bachelor or higher Degree) (35) • Informal training (*e.g.*, short-term course) (5) • Other formal training related to theater (*e.g.*, literature, visual arts) (5)

Note. * = most theater practitioners assume more than one role during their professional career; they designated one role that they identified with the most. The number of interviewees is presented in parentheses. The interviews were conducted between April 2013 and February 2014.

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interviewees to describe their theater experiences in detail from multiple perspectives. The interviewer probed for elaborations for rich and thick information when necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Our analyses revealed five major themes (or components) of theater experiences. We describe each of these themes by sub-themes and with direct quotes in order to help define and elaborate the construct.

Transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed following the procedures of content-analysis of interview texts suggested by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). Transcripts were first divided into meaning units which were sentences or paragraphs relating to the same central meaning (e.g., "A good script prompts you to think about something you have never thought of but worth thinking"). The meaning units were evaluated and sorted into clusters of 62 categories (e.g., evoking emotions, sensation and stimulation, truthfulness in acting, etc.). We continuously developed new categories, refined existing categories and recoded meaning units as we processed more transcripts. A thorough review of the content of the categories resulted in five major themes with respective sub-themes: (a) cognition includes (i) cognitive challenge, (ii) inspiration and (iii) artistic appreciation; (b) emotion includes (i) emotional resonance, (ii) emotional release, (iii) engagement; (c) sensation includes (i) sensory and physiological responses and (ii) aesthetic assessment; (d) authenticity includes (i) sincerity and (ii) truth; and (e) coherence includes (i) script and rhythm and (ii) integration.

5. Theater audience experience framework

5.1. Cognition

Cognition occupies a significant role in audience experience (Brown & Novak, 2007; Eversmann, 2004; New Economics Foundation, 2008; Radbourne et al., 2009). The audience desire performances that challenge them cognitively but they detest performances that they fail to understand. The audience also likes performances that stimulate or inspire them to think about personal issues and the world's problems. The audience also derives enjoyment from evaluating the technical proficiency of a performance.

5.1.1. Cognitive challenge

Theater audience seeks intellectual challenges. They derive satisfaction from "cognitive exercises" like interpreting and deducing the intentions of directors, finding out "answers", and figuring out the meanings of symbols (Eversmann, 2004). The process of a cognitive exercise is in itself a form of enjoyment. An art administrator (Interviewee [I43]) said that "There are a load of questions in it. It may not be straightforward. You have to look around and find clues and information yourself. Exploration is a very beautiful process." Some interviewees stated that they refused to see plays that are unequivocal or straightforward because of the lack of cognitive exercises deprives them of the room to think and to feel free. "Some people like plays that are straightforward but some don't," said a director (I35), "Don't make a fool of me; give me some room to feel the performance myself." Theater audience also dislikes performances that preach to them. An interviewee reported feeling offended by a play that repeated its "message" again and again which was like trying to implant the "message" to his mind. The interviewee grumbled that it was like seeing propaganda rather than a work of art. The audience prefers to have room to think about an issue rather than being given an answer. Another director (I6) lamented that his "imagination is suppressed when a performance is so unambiguously presented." He reckoned that a performance should leave space for the audience to fill something into it but yet most of the performances do not.

> "That play could obviously bring out a societal message like the debate on education nowadays. There are a lot of issues regarding education that the play revisited. Some plays would not tell you about the problems outright. You have to wander through the play, to look for clues, to dig up information; each one of which could be a very beautiful journey and exploration." (I43)

"Does it mean that when you see a play you want to know what it is all about, be prepared for what you are about to see? Sometimes not. Like it is a very interesting experience to look for the theme in some of Peter Brook's work. It is like looking at an abstract painting that you first stand there, you move forward, then you move a little closer. The enjoyment is in the exploration." (I27)

Theater-going is a life-long learning process. Many interviewees reported experiencing personal growth as a theater audience member. When performances become "easy" and are no longer stimulating and challenging, the audience would advance to another "level" and seek other types of performance that require greater cognitive exercise. A playwright (I17) illustrated with an example that a first-time theater-goer may find A Doll's House very satisfying because the story is easy to understand; however, 10 years later the same theater-goer find the play not very good any more as he or she gains more experience in watching the drama.

"A good play is a play that it is worthwhile to see it one more time. Why do we need to see it one more time? It is because you cannot see everything just seeing it once. Every time you feel something different. Taste it slowly, and it gives you a new experience." (I4)

"The best metaphor or the best symbol are those that are naturally developed. After you have seen the whole play, ah ha, you discover that this is the way you could have interpreted it! There are multiple ways to interpret it." (I14)

"When you make it explicit, I will not have any imagination. It is because when you make it explicit, I would not be able to connect. Oftentimes when we see a play we need to fill something in. It means that you have to leave some room for me to fill things in." (I30)

Theater audiences desire cognitive challenges, but they also dislike challenges that they could not overcome to the extent that they fail to understand a performance. Having a basic understanding of the performance is essential to the audiences' enjoyment. Without a basic understanding, further cognitive processes become impossible. Some interviewees reported being frustrated by too many puzzles left unsolved. The audience wants to attain "closure" and to grasp the basic ideas and meanings of a performance (Eversmann, 2004). A performance which is not understood means that the concentration of its audience is lost; this is because the audience hardly finds the performance cognitively stimulating or emotionally moving. A theater critic (I15) shared a confusing theater experience wondering "Are those two people really human or what? Why are they lying down? What are their identities?" These questions kept him away from concentrating at the play and made him doubt the director's conceptualization. "The play should make itself clear; a drama is a failure if people, when halfway through the drama, still don't know what it is about," echoed a director (I6). Theater audiences may also attribute their failure to understand the performance because the artists are not willing to share with the audience. A director (I24) questioned, "why someone should produce a show if it fails to strike a chord or share something with the audience."

In summary, the audience prefers performances that are optimally cognitively challenging. They enjoy performances that they understand and yet allow room for drawing their own interpretations and conclusions.

5.1.2. Inspiration

Inspiration amplifies the overall theater experience. It is the most frequently mentioned aspect when the interviewees described their most memorable plays, as reported in the past studies (Brown & Novak, 2007; Eversmann, 2004; New Economics Foundation, 2008; Radbourne et al., 2009). Inspiration in an art experience is to reflect and rethink one's own condition and to think about world issues (Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2011). The two components of inspiration are reflection and stimulation.

A satisfying theater experience helps the audience to reflect on their own lives and to deliberate on social issues. Interviewees reported that when they saw similarities between themselves and the narratives, they could more easily identify with the scenarios portrayed on the stage. While the audience identifies with the characters on stage and immerses himself or herself in dealing with their fictitious problems, the audience is also confronting his or her personal real-life issues. Interviewees reported that sometimes they were able to find answers to their own problems and this leads them to make real changes in their own lives. As suggested by Eversmann, the audience compares their own lives with the plays and recognize themselves in the characters and scenarios on the stage. A director/performer (I33) would evaluate a play if it could "help a person solve the problems facing his or her life and remind the audience that something can be changed in their life."

> "It makes you wonder whether you have ever encountered something similar in your life. How would you manage that? The play inspires you; it makes you wiser, smarter, more intelligent." (I20).

Interviewees saw the theater as a spiritual nourishment that satisfies them mentally. Interviewees stated that inspiration is a lasting process that could result from a deep reflection and discussion with others. The most memorable and satisfying performances were those that "opened their mind" and "gave them a new angle to see the world" and that influenced their own lives. A director (I25) stated that "a good script could prompt people to think of something that you have never thought of before."

> "Not only seeing the play, but also seeing how the director thinks of life. Why the director chooses this play but not others is already revealing his take on life." (I28)

> "At a deeper level it is entertainment for the intellect. You see the philosophy of life, like 'to let go', 'to be more optimistic', … I don't know, something like these. These philosophical beliefs give you birth again, they make you think again, 'ah, that's why!', 'what is freedom?'. You think about questions besides those just about living through a day. Sometimes you get the answer sometimes you don't but at least you get a reminder. (I24)

Inspiration does not necessarily come immediately. Interviewees were delighted to find insights inspired by a performance that they felt like learning something and attaining personal growth, which is similar to what Eversmann proposes that the audience asks for thought-provoking performances to challenge their established personal notions and to enrich their theater experiences.

> "I like to watch plays that are intellectual. It makes you think, makes you reflect upon the state of a person, your state of being during certain circumstances, or your state of existence." (I43)

> "Theater is about staging a story, a human condition. Perhaps we call this 'condition' an 'action'. It should be about some solemn matter, that it inspires people to pursue, to sacrifice for the greatness of life, that it is worthwhile to be staged, unlike those tabloid or entertainment news that have no gravity. The function of a play is to display the state of being." (I38)

No all interviewees equated inspiration and spiritual nourishment with seriousness. Being light-hearted or even farcical could also be inspirational as a reminder that we should not forget about the lighter part of life.

> "But to some extent we may indeed desire some comedy, some pure comedy. People laugh, laugh, and laugh till their tears come out. 'The play is so mean, really mean.' Despite going through perhaps a very bitter life, they may then think I don't have to look at things this way and we could put some humor in our life." (I32)

5.1.3. Artistic appreciation

Our interviewees also emphasized that artistic inspiration was a crucial element in their theater experience. Artistic appreciation is akin to aesthetic growth in that it includes being inspired by new art forms and being stimulated creatively by more ideas. Theater audiences who are artistically inspired change their attitudes towards an art form and develop interests in an artist's works (Brown & Novak, 2007). The audience derives satisfaction from adopting an analytic approach in appreciating a theater performance. The audience, especially those with some theater knowledge, enjoy playing an "analytic game," such as evaluating technical proficiency and evaluating a performance like a critic while watching it (Eversmann, 2004). A director/performer (I20) said that when he wanted to see not only the character but also the actor; in particular, he wanted to see how an actor manipulates the character. Interviewees said they derived enjoyment from the process of analyzing artistic quality and appreciating artistic values of a performance. They go to the theater to enjoy the work of the artist that they admire.

> "This is about admiration of an artist. You are drunk by that artist's aesthetics, elegance, and poetic language of the theater. It is about appreciating the work of different artists. When you know an artist, you go to the theater to enjoy the artist's work. "(I43)

Artistic appreciation is derived from not only watching what are being displayed but also from looking at the mind behind the work.

> "Say 'The Golden Dragon' written by Roland Schimmelpfennig. I could feel his pursuit of artistic excellence… I could even see it…I could see that he is going in a direction that I admire. Or like 'Isabella's Room', there are some artistic approaches that I really admire. There are impacts, something to stimulate me as an audience." (I40)

> "It is like looking at modern art; you have no idea what they are doing. You have to look at the mind behind their work; this is the beauty. You see beauty in the whole production including the art, the cast and the director." (I36)

Being analytic while watching a performance does not always contribute to enjoyment. Many interviewees reported that when they watched a performance analytically, they became detached and found it difficult to get into the performance. There is a trade-off between deriving enjoyment from an analytic game and being engaged in the performance. Being too used to analyzing a performance technically, two directors were both dismayed that they were no longer able to see a performance as it was.

> "We could cognitively or analytically describe to you what I like and what I dislike. But we could no longer be an audience 100%, a typical audience, sitting there to 'enjoy the show'. Just as I am in the middle watching a performance, 'aiya, a discontinuation here; aiya, aiya, this is not smooth'. See, very cognitively, very technically that we watch a performance. The other audience are watching the performance very happily; they do not sense any of that. So, we are missing this thing, this kind of enjoyment. Is it good or not good? I think it is not good." (I6)

> "The best is when I am watching a play I do not know I am watching a play. I think the best play should be like this, that you forget that you are watching a play. But as a professional audience, you are always hiding a ruler behind your back to measure the play. It makes it very difficult for you to get into that state." (I33)

5.2. Emotion

Theater audiences enjoy performances that connect with them emotionally. The audience develops emotional connections with the situation portrayed on stage and with the characters in the stories. The theater is also a venue for emotional release.

5.2.1. Emotion resonance

Emotion resonance is a joyful state that the audience experience when they are able to develop identification with and empathy for the characters and the plot (Brown & Novak, 2007; Eversmann, 2004). The interviewees stated that they experienced intense emotional responses when they were able to project their own stories and experiences onto the stage and compare their own experiences with the dramas. The connection between the audience's personal experiences and the performance's narratives underlie emotional resonance (Eversmann, 2004; New Economics Foundation, 2008). Identification shortens the psychological distance and builds up intimacy between an audience and a drama character (Fiske, 1989). Intimacy between an audience member and a character makes it easier for the audience members to feel what the characters experience. Emotional resonance contributes considerably to audience enjoyment. Some interviewees reckoned that it is universal and human nature that everyone could be touched by a performance regardless of time and space, and especially on themes like family relations that we could all relate to.

> "You know…theater is inseparable from living, from life, from human being. You see, everything is about people's experience, people's story. Theater is about rewriting that story and staging that story. What's on stage is a person's experience and you are a person yourself; you are bound to find some connection there. Somewhere inside that connection may click —you share something in common; although not exactly the same, there are some feelings, some thoughts, some circumstances that you find familiar, you find interesting. Naturally you reach that spot, that sometimes you cry with the play. That feels great, really great… that's a very touching feeling." (I43)

> "At a deeper level, it is about that emotion, that genuine feeling. You resonate with that emotion. You understand that person's feelings although you are not him." (I24)

> "Whenever there are scenes about father-and-son, father-and-daughter, mother and son, because these are projections from my own life experience, my own emotions, I have had these experiences before therefore I would project my circumstances and feelings, I would connect with those scenes." (I23)

The audience needs to take an active role in drawing emotional connections between themselves and the narratives. Eversmann also reckons that some audience members can develop emotional resonance with performances that have no apparent relevance to them. An example is two interviewees of the same cultural background reacting differently to the same story about a foreign place. A director/stage designer (I6) resonated with the sentiment in the play as a shared human emotion that affected him deeply.

> "Apparently the story has nothing to do with me. It was talking about some villages in Taiwan that Hong Kong has nothing like that. The emotions were mild but they touched you. No melodrama like life and death. But in fact seldom do we encounter these life and death emotions in everyday life. Depicting a mundane life genuinely, those emotions flowed, however mildly; but they were there, touching us." (I6)

However, the same play evoked a completely opposite experience for a director/performer (I27) who found the cultural differences damping any possible emotional resonance.

> "There are problems with cultural differences. … The play talked too much about the lives of Taiwan, its dreams, politics, sufferings. They are so far away from me, very very far away from me. There was a line calling their president a bastard. Many people laughed. But I did not get it. These things are distant. Frankly speaking, I was a bit confused. I could not tell who were the people they were making references to. … After the show was over, I could not put together who's who, I could not tell if they act well, whether their emotions were consistent, whether their costumes were appropriate." (I27)

Some interviewees went even further to suggest that being emotional resonating or being touched is not enough. The artist and the audience could only be connected when the work charms the audience.

> "Most people become superficial when they watch a play—'please make me feel touched'. I don't understand why we need to be touched. The correct word should be 'charm'. I want to charm the audience. Say you look at the painting of Mona Lisa. You would be charmed. The charm comes from you are being at awe how Da Vinci could have accomplished that. You look at the paintings of Van Gogh. Maybe you don't know how to paint. But you look at Sunflowers, or whatever, you are charmed. What is this charm? Maybe you are charmed by the artist's charm. Maybe you are charmed by the artist's thinking. This is the connection between the artist and the audience." (I5)

5.2.2. Emotional release

Theater audiences project their internal emotional response to the play as a means of emotional release. Walmsley also found that emotional release is a key motivation of theater-going. A director (I24) reasoned that Hong Kong women in the past loved watching Hong Kong black-and-white films which were tear-jerking and they cried so passionately because these women could relieve their emotions. "It's simply an emotion entertainment because these women suffered a lot at home but they could not cry; watching tearful films, they could allow themselves to cry," said the director.

The theater has long been considered as serving the function of catharsis to purify emotions for healing and restoration. Art helps self-expression (Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2011) and the audience relieve their negative emotions through drama which is supposed to elicit intense feelings (Meisiek, 2004; Walmsley, 2013). For instance, an interviewee stated that sometimes he enjoyed seeing farces which he felt to be a means of venting his suppressed emotions through laughter. Another interviewee found that intense emotions as elicited through seeing a performance is a cleansing experience.

> "Sometimes there are interesting feelings that the play is like emptying you out. The play creates an ambiance to make you feel that I am here to be cleansed." (I37)

5.2.3. Engagement

Engagement is being absorbed in the performance that is analogous to intense satisfaction (Brown & Novak, 2007) and an optimal experience like "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Eversmann, 2004) that brings enjoyment and contentment.

Theater audience who were engaged reported feeling "losing track of time" and "losing sense of one self". Some even claimed that successful performances should make an audience member forget that they are seeing a performance (Eversmann, 2004; Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2011; Walmsley). A director/actor (I42) said that he could genuinely tell if he felt bored, "Typically I will not look at my watch. Once I look at my watch, I know it."

Many interviewees described that total immersion in a play is a way to escape from reality that leads to positive emotions like fulfillment. Regardless of whether the audience is experiencing positive or negative emotions, they find relaxation when they are engaged in the performance and when they forget about their daily life (Eversmann, 2004; Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2011).

> "First and foremost, seeing a show is entertainment. I am here to shut my brain off. Say I were an accountant; it is about tax time and all these hassles clog my mind. At the theater I could put these things aside. If the play is enticing enough I could have one or two hours totally immersed in the play." (I35)

Emotion and cognition are inseparable (Boerner et al., 2010; Brown & Novak, 2007; Eversmann, 2004). The interviewees pointed out that the theater should get the audience "to feel before they

think". A number of interviewees stressed that a performance must connect with the audience emotionally before the audience are able to find intellectual stimulation from the performance. However, interview data suggest that typically the audience first develop emotional connections based on a basic understanding of the performance. The growing and strengthening emotions then trigger the audience to engage in more complex and in-depth cognitive processing. The cognition and emotion dimensions are closely connected and interdependent. A director (I38) describes a good drama "should have something to tell but should absolutely not be a lengthy sermon; uses plots and stories to touch and to influence you but does not preach at you." The play makes an impact on the audience when the actor, and the audience are engaged, even beyond laughing and crying together, but like living the same life together.

> "At that few minutes the actor and the audience are connected. Not only are they concerned about what is going to happen to the character, they are also facing the challenge together. Even deeper it is beyond just crying or laughing together. Laughing and crying together is just a symptom. Underneath this symptom, in a colloquial saying, it is 'engagement'. Digging even further it is like being that character. You are empathizing together, contemplating the same issues, and then you make some decisions. When we experience some changes it is like we are living through the same life." (I37)

5.3. Sensation
Sensation is the instant impact that the audience receives and which covers both sensory and physiological responses and the aesthetic aspect.

5.3.1. Sensory and physiological responses
The most direct audience experience is perceptual stimulation. Eversmann states that sensation is an instant feeling without the need for thinking and interpretation. Sensory stimuli provide the audience with sensory entertainment and memorable perceptual satisfaction. A director (I4) shared his experience seeing "Lord of the Rings" the musical that the stage was like a cake that could rise, turn and open, "It was magical and exciting. What a fantasy!"

> "Drum rolls give you, regardless of who you are, a feeling of alertness, right? A very strong sense of alertness. Listen, drum rolls. BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM BOM, like that. So, you will be in this mental state; adrenaline pumping up." (I9)

Consistent with Eversmann and New Economics Foundation, the interviewees reported that some perceptual stimuli elicited physiological responses. A director/actor (I18) stated that rock music and powerful fighting scenes injected him with energy and power and raised his heartbeat. He felt happy and excited because these effects produced visual and audible sensation and stimulation—-"a different kind of enjoyment." Sensory stimulations could also promote emotional connections that some audience appreciate. A director/performer (I27) recalled that it was not the story but music that affected him emotionally because "music is really powerful that touches people's heart."

> "Technical operations on stage need to be handled very well. These are special effects. These effects are needed in every play. These are surprises for the audience. These effects are needed in order to arouse the interest of the audience to continue to watch the play, or to make them feel very amazed." (I27)

> They look great visually, they have impact. For example, snowflakes falling... you feel warm... then music. The image makes you feel warm. The image creates an impact." (I42)

Some other interviewees, however, considered bells and whistles distracting and annoying. They preferred simplicity because daily life is already full of too many stimulations. Theater is about the communication between people that excessive technical effects are unnecessary.

"I think the world is changing. Now I would hope the stage would become simpler. There are now too much visuals. We are bombarded with too much information, like the internet… Every day we walk on the street, watch television; those visuals are intrusive, are bombing us. People 50 years ago would be scared to death by our current life. The world is indeed changing. If we want to see the "genuineness" of life, we have to remain calm, be simple, take different perspectives. I hope there could be fewer things on stage. There are too many things in our daily life already, making me tired, disorientated." (I4)

"All a sudden there is a light change, and then sound effect. Unnecessary, totally unnecessary. The whole scene is just about these two people. It is just simple between these two people; there is no need for all these effects. Simple is the best. Really. That's what acting is. That precision, that simplicity, exactly it is just communication between one person and another person." (I1)

While sensation is an important element for the enjoyment of theater, nearly all interviewees reckoned that theater should go beyond sensory entertainment. Eversmann reckons that sensory elements should have only a supportive role in facilitating the script and the performance. Sensory stimulations that are too eye-catching could distract or hinder the audience from receiving the performance. A director/stage designer (I6) stated that "The best stage designs are the ones that help the audience read the drama but the audience totally ignore it when watching a drama."

Many interviewees echoed that the primary function of the theater should not be sensory entertainment. "There are many levels in entertainment. Some are visually pleasing with songs and dances or glamorous costumes or attractive actors. It's visually pleasing. It is also a kind of entertainment but it is superficial," said a director/playwright (I7). A director/performer (I32) further clarified that "although sensation stimulation is necessary, it should not be the kind that serves only to please the audience or that spurs sentimentality."

Theater audiences "mimic" performers unconsciously and often they experience similar muscle impulses as the performers who are acting on the stage (Eversmann, 2004). Mimicking does not occur only between the audience and performers but also among the audience members. Some interviewees reported that they experienced physiological responses similar to that of other audience members and they felt like bonding with each other. This is an experience of collective engagement among audience members so that they feel connected (Brown & Novak, 2007; New Economics Foundation, 2008; Radbourne, Glow, & Johanson, 2010). Mutual sensations of similar physiological responses may enrich the theatrical experience. An administrator/performer (I9) even remarked that we could feel through our skin as a sense organ that "You feel the same depth of breathing among the audience. You're listening. The breathing of the audience is the same. Breathing at the same depth produces a sound. When many people have the same depth of breathing like you do, the sound will be amplified and you'll be able to hear it."

5.3.2. Aesthetic assessment

Aesthetic takes a center role in art. Theater audiences derive enjoyment from appreciating the design and beauty of the performance—an appreciation which can be about lighting, music, body movements, and so on. For example, an administrator (I43) stated that "color is the arts of the stage." "Ugliness, presented skillfully, can be aesthetically pleasing and enjoyable, too." echoed a performer (I11). The "ugliness" that is being appreciated has to be perceived as well designed and well planned. If the effect is not designed well or executed in accordance with the purpose of the theater-makers, the audience will doubt the ability of the actors or theater-makers. The effect will not be considered as aesthetically pleasing, and it will hinder the audience from engaging in the performance. The audience pursues aesthetic pleasure that is not limited to superficial beauty. Although the interviewees did not have a consensus on aesthetic standards, one general principle is that all elements on stage should be designed and planned by theater-makers with a conscious effort. A director/performer (I44) believed that "art is something that should be constructed with

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a conscious effort." An art administration (I43) stated that "in addition to the content that makes a person think, the artistic aspects are also very important, the creativity is very important."

5.4. Authenticity

Theater audience desire performances that are authentic; they look for truth and sincerity in the performance. Our conceptualization of authenticity is similar to the definition of Radbourne, Glow, & Johanson, 2013) which also addresses emotional perception, technical proficiency of the per-formance such as faithfulness to the original script, believability of acting, and fulfillment of audience expectation.

5.4.1. Sincerity

Interviewees cared whether artists are willing to share with the audience. Especially in those art forms where the audience is a part of the performance (Martin et al., 1995), the extent to which the audience perceives that theater-makers are willing to share their work influences the reception of the show. Although this is an important construct which is mentioned by various interviewees, they could not quite verbalize precisely what "willingness to share" is. One illustration is whether artists are performing with sufficient "energy" to reach the audience sitting all the way at the back of the theater. Another illustration is whether artists are performing to themselves or to the audience. Some interviewees felt that artists could be absorbed so fully in their own performance that they are not performing to the audience. A third illustration is a demand that artists should show that they enjoy their performance on stage. "Enjoyment" for an artist onstage could be conceived as feeling confident, being totally immersed, and having pleasure in acting out the scene. Interviewees stated that they would not enjoy a performance unless they felt that the performers have a pleasurable experience on stage. The audience could tell different levels of engagement between actors. "The actors have to be engaged in the play first," said a director/actor (I20), "if they are not, we cannot get into it; if yes, we will also be engaged naturally. We could differentiate. Is he or she engaged?" (I20). A sincere performance is personal that the performing cast and the production team are passionate in sharing with the audience that they are not just doing a job.

> "The actor is giving you something personal. He is not just talking to oneself. He is sharing with you. He is showing feelings." (I43)

> "I even think that each character is in fact opening up its heart, sharing with us as such." (I9)

> "Why do we act? Because of a mission? It is about the soul. We exchange our soul with other actors, with the audience, with the playwright. We need to offer our soul, passionately; it is not just a job." (I3)

> "You could feel it. The power of the play differs a lot depending on whether it is sincere. It is not like a director or a playwright wanting to say something, and some people getting some money, then a production is there. This is a totally different thing from a group of people yearning to do something, having a creative passion, and accomplishing that to share with others." (I4)

Some interviewees trusted that professionals would usually be able to produce decent work. However, some cast doubts regarding the work of professionals that although they could compe-tently "assemble" a play, without sincerity their work is lifeless.

> "Unless they have very bad actors; otherwise, some decent actors, doing a show on such a topic, it cannot be too bad. In other words, some decent director, some decent actors, not just average, but decent professional standard, then it has to be good." (I12)

> "Those seasoned actors and actresses could cold-read a play very competently on their first day. All those intonations and actions are already thought out. But quite possibly nothing much has changed from their third day to the day of the performance. They are

assembling a play; they are not rehearsing a play. Say, when you click the pen three times, I will say 'I am leaving'. This is assembled. But say I see that you are clicking your pen, I feel that you are bored, and I suggest 'let's go'; this is not assembled, this is what we discover through the rehearsal process. You see the difference? Something that is assembled is too well-structured. It makes the play lifeless." (I11)

5.4.2. Truth

"Truth" refers particularly to acting. Notwithstanding the diverse approaches to theater forms and acting, theater audiences generally ask for authentic acting that makes them believe in and engage with the fictional world portrayed on stage. Interviewees indicated that they were more likely to be touched by performances with authentic acting, giving the impression that the characters "are living on stage" and "exist in the real world". They valued performers "being the characters rather than acting the characters" and "interacting with and not being independent of one another". Interviewees stated that the essence of authentic acting is expressing authentic emotions. Many interviewees stated that the key to authenticity is to believe.

> "It is really about believing or not believing. That is, if the actor is in the character, inside the character, then you are "being" the character; you believe in the situation, you believe in the character, then whatever that you do "is" the character. It seems vague; but the difference is indeed believing or not believing. If you do not believe, whatever you do, your behavior, your words, your habits, your everything, just become an actor's representation of that character; you are just pretending to be that character." (I1)

> "Their acting is so stereotypical. That means, you just act evil for an evil character, act lusty for a lusty character; that is so fake. ... How could you make the audience believe? You have to believe; the actor has to believe. How could an actor believe? You have to be true. Once you don't believe, it becomes fake. Why would the audience not believe? It is because the actor does not believe. It is because you "act"; you act effortfully. Then, it is disastrous." (I6)

> "The way he says his lines are different from many of his peers. The first time I heard his lines he sounded unnatural. However, his rhythm and intonation gradually made me believe that that voice belonged to that character. Gradually I got used to it, feeling very comfortable. You just believed it was the way it was supposed to be. That was a personal, a very subjective experience. In particular, I think that as an actor we have to make the audience believe that this is the way the character is supposed to be." (I19)

A "true" performance could be very powerful. Truthfulness in acting is energy radiating throughout the atmosphere engulfing the audience.

> "The 'atmosphere' diffuses towards you. Our jargon is 'energy'. The energy, is diffused in the air. Diffused, which means that the acting is not only directing forward, but it is radiating. It is like radar, emitting, energy emitting. Otherwise how could I, being on stage, make a thousand or more spectators feel my presence. It is not because of, it is not depended on, a microphone. That is the 'air', the 'energy' diffusing." (I1)

5.5. Coherence

Theater audiences appreciate a performance that is coherent and in which all elements of the production serve and reinforce each other.

5.5.1. Script and rhythm

Coherence of a script was most often discussed. An interviewee said that "dialogues and plots should be closely connected... any parts omitted should impair understanding of the script". The interviewees commented that if the script was loose, they would lose track and feel frustrated because they could not follow and comprehend the story. Every plot in the performance has to be interdependent and interrelated. A director (I24) recalled an absurd experience seeing a musical

when the lead actor appeared and sang his signature song that was not in line with the play, "Nothing was relevant. It was abrupt."

Coherence is also about rhythm. Interviewees mentioned that the rhythm of the performance should be synchronized with the script and be adjusted in accordance with the motivations of the characters. Eversmann also states the ensemble should follow the same rhythm. The interviewees stated that appropriate rhythm was perceptual and subjective; it depends on the artistic purpose of the theater-makers. "Each play has its own distinctive rhythm. It's different," remarked a director (I12).

> "This is how a director or a team of theater practitioners captivate the audience—they use the simplest variation, the most appropriate rhythm to present their work." (I27)

> "The pace, the rhythm. How the lines should be spoken one after another concerns rhythm. If you slow down, even by half-a-second, the feeling will be very different." (I23)

5.5.2. Integration

A satisfactory audience experience could hardly be accounted for by the isolated factors of a performance. The whole is more than the sum of its parts; how the different aspects are integrated makes or breaks a performance. Coherence also means a similar level of proficiency in the different areas of the performance. One distinctively good element that stands out among other average elements leads to incoherence. For example, one seasoned performer acting among a cast of amateurs makes the performance odd. When multiple theatrical elements are not well integrated, they may distract the audience from comprehending the performance and the audience may lose his or her focus. A director/actor (I42) remarked that if one part of a play is serious and another part is not, the audience would not know from which perspective they should view the production. He explicitly stated that "every element on stage should serve the core of the play." Various interviewees shared the same view that coherence in acting states, coherence among technical effects, and coherence in presentation styles are essential to audience enjoyment.

> "The states of the different actors and actresses did not seem to be in sync. It means that we could not clearly see the overall picture how the director wanted the entire performing cast to be. When you watched the performance, it became difficult for you to enter into their world. Not very comfortable." (I40)

> "Er… just very vaguely if you want me to criticize those lyrics. There is one thing I find uncomfortable. It is about haphazardly, without any coherence, phrasing some lyrics in a local Cantonese dialect. If it is consistent throughout the whole song, or the whole musical, it is fine. But these just occurs haphazardly, it is weird. (I33)

> "When they develop the whole design concept, their purpose is to support the whole production in order to create a certain ambiance. They adopt a unifying style to structure the play." (I37)

The many different aspects of a play, when they are well integrated, provide multiple layers of enjoyment that make a whole more than the sum of its parts.

> "The acting was good, the song was well-written; the structure, the way how that song was being used, very good. Only when I am fulfilled in many different aspects, I would think of it as a good play." (I33)

> "It is not just costumes alone, or lighting, or backdrop, or set design, some device on stage. In fact, everything altogether should be going towards the same spot. We do not know where that spot is eventually. But people in different departments: the performing cast, designers, set designers, they are all going towards that same spot. And finally, they present to you this product. And this product would then have many different layers." (I35)

6. Discussion

Through in-depth interviews with the 45 professional theater practitioners in Hong Kong, we identified five theater experience components, namely, cognition, emotion, sensation, authenticity, and coherence. The five factors identified in this study share common elements with other audience experience models. The cognition factor that emphasizes cognitive challenges is similar to Eversmann's and Boerner and Jobst's cognitive dimension and New Economics Foundation 's learning and challenging dimension. Also consistent with these two previous studies, what our interviewees enjoyed the most was experiencing optimal cognitive challenges. Theater audiences want not only entertainment, but they also strive to achieve enlightenment through their theater experiences.

Theater experience is also emotion-driven. The audience enjoys emotional resonance, and they also release and project their emotions while watching a performance (Boerner and Jobst; Brown & Novak, 2007; Eversmann, 2004; New Economics Foundation, 2008). Engagement as being fully immersed in a performance that results in relaxation and contentment could be likened to a flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Walmsley).

Coherence is a key factor in theater experience. Eversmann has also identified "coherence" but this element is nested under the perceptual dimension and it is considered by Boerner and Jobst as a perceived artistic quality. However, we stipulate that coherence covers a broader scope than "coherence among perceptual elements". Coherence is about how all aspects of a performance are being integrated. It is like the Gestalt perspective that focuses on the whole rather than the sum of its parts. Coherence also echoes the emphasis that theater is an ensemble work.

Authenticity has been conceptualized as the extent to which a performance meets the audience's expectation and the extent to which the audience perceives truth and believability in the performance (Radbourne et al., 2009). On top of these components, our conceptualization of authenticity also addresses the extent to which the theater-makers are enjoying their presence on stage and are willing to communicate and share their work with the audience. The facet of willing to communicate is similar to Eversmann's communicative dimension, Radbourne *et al.*'s (Radbourne et al., 2009) collective engagement, and Boerner and Jobst's conative response. Communication among audience members could be explicit (direct) like verbal discussion and eye contact or implicit (indirect) like feeling the presence of others and the ambiance of the theater.

Sensation is a factor common to many audience experience frameworks (Brown & Novak, 2007; Eversmann, 2004; New Economics Foundation, 2008). Our conceptualization of sensation is also similar to those of others that concern emotional and physiological responses as stimulated by a performance. In addition, our sensation factor also addresses an aesthetic element—the extent to which a performance is aesthetically pleasing and consistent—that stage design, lights and sounds are reinforcing each other and supporting the play. Sensation was a significant predictor of overall satisfaction except in proscenium theater productions. Interestingly, Boerner et al. (2010) also found no effect of their perceptual dimension. One of our interviewees noted that although sensation does influence enjoyment, perceptual effects always take a supporting role to serve a play; sensation is never the utmost and/or a must-have criterion for a "good" drama.

In contrast with the past studies' emphasis on social and cultural bonding in the theater (Brown & Novak, 2007; New Economics Foundation, 2008; Radbourne et al., 2009), very few interviewees mentioned feelings of connectedness and a sense of inclusion in their theater experiences. Most interviewees reported that they were not aware of and were not concerned about other audience's reactions. The omission of a connectedness or collective engagement factor could be due to our interviewing of theater professionals that they were not typical audiences and were not concerned about connecting with fellow audience members. In order to address the concern that our findings could be atypical because our respondents were professional theater practitioners, we coded responses of 996 audience members who provided open-ended comments on a post-show survey. These surveys were collected from 17 drama or

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musical productions performed by the top two professional theater companies in Hong Kong. These productions, all performed in Cantonese, i.e., the local dialect, included proscenium stage and black box productions of premiers and re-reruns of locally scripted plays or translated plays. We believe that the views expressed by these respondents could represent the majority of the Hong Kong theater audiences. Analyses of the open-ended comments made by typical audiences also show that connectedness was rarely mentioned as a response to a theater performance. We could be more certain that the omission of connectedness in our theater experience model is not a result of the interviewing of theater professionals but not of typical audiences.

We developed our theater experience model based on responses of professional theater practitioners because they are the expert theater-goers. They could offer in-depth analyses of their own viewing experiences and to help illustrate with a wide range of concrete examples that amateur theater-goers could not readily do. More importantly, theater professionals are able to realize and verbalize subtle feelings and thoughts that matter to viewing experience but amateurs may not be able to readily identify. Responses of professional theater practitioners could be a superset, or at least a richer set, of responses of typical theater-goers.

The lack of concern for connectedness could be a distinct cultural or geographical nature of the theaterscape in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, there are theater halls in different communities and there is also a venue-partner scheme that different theater halls are championed by different theater companies; however, there is not yet an atmosphere that theater halls or theater companies are attracting a critical mass of general audiences that they feel that they are part of some local or theater community. While the Hong Kong theater scene is buoyant, it is still in its infancy stage. As it matures, the aspect of connectedness may perhaps become apparent and a critical part of the theater experience.

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