Framing Performance Magic: The Role of Contract, Discourse and Effect


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Abstract

A wide continuum of genres in performance magic has developed since the Victorian period, including stage magic, street magic, close-up magic, comedy magic, mentalism, bizarre and mystery entertainment. Each of these genres frames its performance on a different contract between the performer and the audience, the discourse used during performance and the effect on the audience both in terms of its perception of what has transpired and the personal meaning attached to the effect. This article examines this interplay between contract, discourse and effect in theory and practice. The article constructs a typology of performance magic which is then explored through an examination of audience perception and feedback from a drama workshop and focus group conducted at the University of Huddersfield in October 2012. The group experienced three performances framed around the idea of the magician, the mentalist, and the mystic, and the ensuing discussion revealed a wide range of insights into these different framings of performance. The reactions and ensuing discussions involved different understandings of trust, plausibility, explanation, authority, and dynamic interaction.
Social scientists have documented framing effects in a wide range of contexts, including surveys, experiments, and actual political campaigns. Many view work on framing effects as evidence of citizen incompetence—that is, evidence that citizens base their preferences on arbitrary information and/or are subject to extensive elite manipulation. I next assess the implications of equivalency framing effects and emphasis framing effects for citizen competence. In the course of this discussion, the usefulness of distinguishing the two types of framing effects from one another will become apparent—specifically, they have unique implications for citizen competence, involve different psychological processes, and work under varying conditions.7. Defining citizen competence. Framing in Discourse is a collection of articles that use Goffman's ideas about frames in explicating a variety of linguistic interactions. The first two chapters, Tannen's "What's in a Frame?" and Tannen and Cynthia Walter's "Interactive Frames and Knowledge Schemas in Interaction," are reprinted, the former from a 1979 book and the latter from a sociology journal. Although neither is difficult to find in its original format, it is useful to have them together here. Tannen reviews the concepts of cognitive frames, schemas, or scripts as these ideas were be