

11-22-2012

Are Rage Comics Really Comics?

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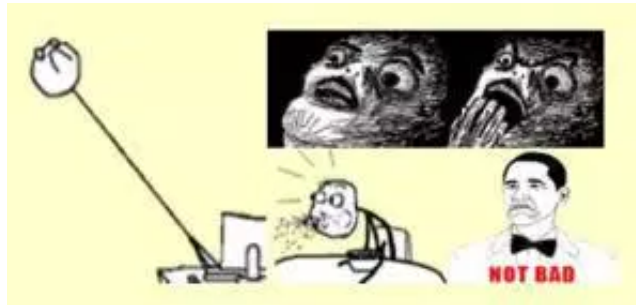
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Bramlett, Frank, "Are Rage Comics Really Comics?" (2012). *English Faculty Publications*. 23.
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(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/surprise-collage.jpg>)
conventions of surprise in rage comics

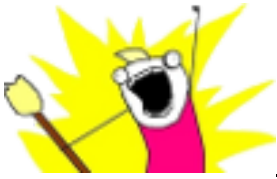
Notable here is the category of “surprise” and the range of intensity of that emotion represented in each image. Both the convention of the long neck and the convention of the gasp convey much stronger emotional responses than the term “surprise” may indicate. But this is often the point of rage comics, to heighten the representations of the emotions. On the other hand, many of the images don’t “overdo” the emotion, like the “Not Bad Obama” image. In any event, the images serve to make commentary on a situation.

The rage comic below describes a situation that many people have experienced. Playing this arcade-style “claw game” is notoriously difficult. How much money has been spent in these machines trying to claim a tiny plush toy or other kind of gadget from the treasure pile? Notice in panel 4 the word ***drop!***.



(<https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/claw-game-fail-2012-fall.png>)
claw game fail

At the end of the game, when we almost always drop the treasure, do we feel rage? Do the red eyes of the character in the last panel resound with readers because of realism or because of exaggeration? It would also be easy to change the ending of the comic. If on the off chance that we do succeed in claiming our treasure, we could use an image from the ‘VICTORIOUS’ category of the rage comics conventions, as follows:



[_ \(https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/victorious-1.png\)](https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/victorious-1.png)
 [\(https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/victorious-1.png\)](https://pencilpanelpage.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/victorious-1.png) victorious

Should Rage Comics be considered comics? Are they sequential art? Conversely, are they simply “cut and paste” images that should not in any sense be compared to “comic art”? Do they mock the loving care that many (all?) comics artists devote to their creations? Is this an up-to-date color-by-number gimmicky analogue for the internet generation?

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About Frank Bramlett

Until June 2014, I am a visiting lecturer in the English Department at Stockholm University, where I offer seminars in Sociolinguistics; Language and Gender; and Language and Comics; among others. For Fall 2014, I will return to the English Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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