Abstract

On October 10, 2010 on Fox network, the third episode The Simpsons’ twenty-second season called ‘MoneyBart’ (or ‘MoneyBART’) has satirized its own network and industry featuring an Asian sweatshop with a dark introductory sequence storyboarded by famous United Kingdom graffiti artist Banksy that is the first time an artist has been invited to storyboard part of the show.¹ (Pic. 1)

Analysis

By The Guardian², “Banksy is said to have been inspired by reports³⁴ that Simpsons characters are animated in Seoul, South Korea. The sequence is said to have been one of the most closely guarded secrets in US television – comparable to the concealment of Banksy’s own identity.”

“The first few 35 seconds of the sequence feature the near-usual credits, except for a few ‘Banksy’ tags on prominent Springfield buildings,” and then later “pans to a dark, dilapidated factory where dozens of workers animate sketches of the family. Cats are shown being thrown into a wood chipper to create stuffing for merchandise such as Bart Simpson dolls. A unicorn, chained to the factory wall, is used to punch holes in DVDs. The titles end with a grim image of the logo of the show’s owner, 20th Century Fox, guarded by searchlights, a watchtower and a barbed wire fence.”

The BBC is reporting that “according to Banksy, the controversial credits caused delays behind the scenes, disputes over broadcast standards and a threatened walk-out by the show’s animation department.” When comparing the similarity of the original storyboard and the Simpsons animation, Executive producer Al Jean said that "95 percent of it is just the way he [Banksy] wanted," but declined to say what was in the censored 5%, only saying that the original version was "even a little sadder."

In January 2011, Banksy uploaded the original storyboard on the Internet. “It appears that a poster of Rupert Murdoch could be the 5% that was left out of the final cut.”

(Pic. 2a, 2b)

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6 Same as note 2
The reason of disappearing the portrait of Rupert Murdoch from the original storyboard because of countless revenue from The Simpsons and the 20th (21st) Century Fox owned by Rupert Murdoch.

“A somewhat unsubtle statement on the state of commercialism and consumerism”\textsuperscript{11}, The Simpsons is the most successful television brand of all time with global DVD and merchandising sales of more than $8 billion (£5.1 billion), according to a survey of industry experts.\textsuperscript{12} “The Simpsons has provided endless fodder for manufacturers and retailers.”\textsuperscript{13} Peter Byrne, Fox executive vice-president of licensing and merchandising, called The Simpsons "without doubt the biggest licensing entity that Fox has had, full stop, I would say from either TV or film.”\textsuperscript{14}

“Just about 99.999% of ‘Simpsons’ merchandise is created overseas, quite possibly in sweatshops like the one depicted in the opening of Sunday’s episode. And even if the creators of the show personally object to the way the merchandise is made, there’s no denying the fact that they enjoy the fruits of that sweatshop labor. It’s hard to imagine that anyone receiving checks for Simpsons merchandising is failing to deposit them for moral reasons. In other words, when you help create the problem, you sort of forfeit your right to complain about it. Even if the people behind the Simpsons weren’t aware

\textsuperscript{14} Same as note 13
of what the couch gag contained before they actually saw it, good taste dictates that they might decide not to run the bit, if only because decrying a dilemma while at the same time profiting from it looks somewhat hypocritical.”

In fact, the animation is only around 90% same as the storyboard by Banksy. The hat wearing of workers in the storyboard is conical Asian hat which instead wearing a more fashionable hat in the animation. (Pic. 3a, 3b) In addition, the label of toxic chemical stick outside the barrel is changing to a Chinese word ‘焚’ which means burning from the animation. (Pic. 4a, 4b) From the storyboard, there is a close-up scene of the little boy dipping the celluloid in a radioactive barrel that his clothing is poorly tattered, but missing out in the animation. And the boy was likely suffering cancer by having only little hair in Banksy’s idea while the boy in the video is a normal boy. (Pic. 5) Also, the boy vomits beside the vat of toxic goo and the brand name of Simpsons on the goo were not seen in the video. (Pic. 6a, 6b) At the end, the barbed-wire fence is hanging a notice of ‘KEEP OUT’ in the storyboard that also disappears in the animation. (Pic. 7a, 7b)

Al Jean said “it’s very fanciful, far-fetched. None of the things he depicts are true.” It is obvious the changes of the storyboard are mostly about human and the animation shifts the focal point from human to animals. The animation tries to minimize showing the poor working condition by making the environment better than idea of Banksy. Using the Chinese character can let fewer people know what it exactly means, and as no one will believe the sequences of animals are really true, therefore the animation will

15 Same as note 11
16 Same as note 8
become a funny thing and a simple cartoon in the eyes of audience, few people will reflect the deep meaning of the opening sequence by Banksy.

In order to further protest the brand name, Fox Century once banned the video on the Internet. “Fox had a change of heart Monday, probably after realizing exactly what Banksy was saying with his work. The company pulled all YouTube videos of the sequence, including the video with the New York Times article. Only a Hulu video still shows the controversial scene.”¹⁷ A note on the site reads “This video is no longer available due to a copyright claim by Twentieth Century Fox.”¹⁸ Video is banned and someone says “You can’t see a video where 20th Century Fox decries the evil of sweatshops, because 20th Century Fox has also decried the evils of copyright violation.”¹⁹

Conclusion

Most of us will laugh when watching the animation mainly because we focus more on the funny scene of animals than the humans. It is time for us to rethink the meaning of the animation behind - dank, underground maze of sweatshop.

No. of words: 1,000

¹⁹ Same as note 11
Reference


Appendix

Pic. 1  Cover of the original storyboard by Banksy (Source:
Pic. 2a Scene of workers transporting the merchandise – original storyboard

Pic. 2b  
Scene of workers transporting the merchandise – Simpsons animation

(Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX1iplQQJTo)
Pic. 3a  Scene of the women slave over animation cels of the iconic couch image – original storyboard (Source:

Pic. 3b  Scene of the women slave over animation cels of the iconic couch image

– Simpsons animation (Source : http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX1iplQQJTo)
Pic. 4a  Scene of a young boy dips the celluloid in a radioactive barrel – original storyboard (Source:
Pic. 4b  Scene of a young boy dips the celluloid in a radioactive barrel – Simpsons storyboard (Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX1iplQQJTo)
Pic. 6a  Scene of rats scurry amid human skeletons – original storyboard (Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20110126164711/http://www.banksy.co.uk/indoors/simp.html)
Pic. 6b Scene of rats scurry amid human skeletons – Simpsons animation

(Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX1iplQQJTo)
Pic. 7a  Scene of ending with the 20th Century Fox logo, setting behind a barbed-wire fence – original storyboard (Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20110126164711/http://www.banksy.co.uk/indoors/simp.html)
Pic. 7b    Scene of ending with the 20th Century Fox logo, setting behind a barbed-wire fence – Simpsons animation (Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX1iplQQJTo)