ANIMATION AND ADAPTATION

(Production Notes)

MARJANE

Did you have difficulty choosing the material from the four novels you wanted to keep in the movie?

When I was writing the books, I had to remember sixteen years of my life, including things I definitely wanted to forget. It was a very painful process. I dreaded starting the script, and couldn't have done it on my own. The hardest part was the beginning, and distancing myself from the existing narrative. We had to start from scratch, to create something altogether different but with the same material. It's a one-of-a-kind piece. There was no point filming a sequence of panels. People generally assume that a graphic novel is like a movie storyboard, which of course is not the case. With graphic novels, the relationship between the writer and reader is participatory. In film, the audience is passive. It involves motion, sound, music, so therefore the narrative's design and content is very different.

Did you both agree on the look of the film from the very start?

Yes, I guess it could be defined as 'stylised realism', because we wanted the drawing to be completely life-like, not like a cartoon. Therefore, unlike a cartoon, we didn't have that much of a margin in terms of facial expressions and movement. This was the message which I was determined to convey to designers and animators.

I've always been obsessed with Italian neo-realism and German expressionism and soon understood why, as they're post-war film schools. In post-WWI Germany, the economy was so devastated that they couldn't afford to shoot films on location, and so they were shot in studios using mood and amazing geometrical shapes. In post-WWII Italy, the same happened, but things turned out the opposite - they shot films in the streets with unknown actors people who went through the war and experienced great despair. I am myself a post-war person having lived through the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran. The film is a combination of sorts; of German expressionism and Italian neo-realism. It features very down-to-earth, realistic scenes, and a highly design-oriented approach, with images sometimes bordering on the abstract. We were also influenced by elements of movies we both loved, like the fast pace of Scorsese's Goodfellas.

VINCENT

What sources did you draw upon when you started to think of the film?

We knew we had to keep the energy of the novels. We couldn't be content with filming one panel after another. In fact our sources were live-action films. I had seen a lot of Italian comedies because my mother loved them. Marjane is very fond of Murnau and German expressionism, so we drew our inspiration from that and then put together what we both liked. Marjane's book is about family life, so the film was going to be based on a central family theme also. The usual codes in animation didn't seem to fit, so I used movie-style editing, with a great many jump-cuts. Even from an aesthetic viewpoint, we drew our sources from cinematic techniques.

Did you watch films together before starting to work on Persepolis?

I did watch a few films like The Night of the Hunter and Touch of Evil, and some action films like Duel which taught me a lot about editing. When films are well-made, whatever the genre, there are always things to learn.