



# Balancing Act

**The opening of a motorway shatters the tranquil country paradise of a family house. The household slowly begins to disintegrate in an unsettling €4 million (\$6 million) French, Belgian, Swiss co-production, *Home*, shot in Bulgaria. The terrifying story posed some lighting challenges for its French cinematographer.**

It took Agnès Godard, AFC only one reading of the script for *Home*, before she became really enthusiastic about the possibilities. A five-hour conversation in a café with Swiss director Ursula Meier, convinced Godard that they could create something special. “For me the cinematic approach is always decided while reading the script,” explains Godard. “I particularly liked *Home* because there was only one location – the house.”

The location was on a plain with the remains of an airstrip which formed the basis of the highway. The house was constructed by the production crew. “The landscape reminded me of the studio work of Francis Ford Coppola, particularly in the way he decorates his sets, and I found that exciting,” remarks Godard. She also decided to make the exteriors very square-framed and dynamic, using a lot of tracking. For the interiors Godard took a different approach, citing the work of Argentinean director Lucrecia Martel, who tends to take

a more *cinéma vérité* approach. “The exciting part was to make those two approaches work together,” laughs Godard.

There were other references too: “Ursula talked about John Cassavetes’ work,” remembers Godard. The many windows reminded her of Edward Hopper’s paintings – he frequently used a straight horizontal motif, such as a railroad track or a road. Also referenced by the director were stills photographers Jeff Wall and Ralph Eugene Meatyard, with strong documentary approaches to their human subjects.

In the end Godard decided, “... it is much better to forget any references – sometimes even the script. I am always afraid that a film becomes an illustration and I think that is not a good thing. It has to metamorphose to find its own way to exist.”

Godard was also concerned, to create a ‘real’ and yet a ‘not-real’ look. “I was looking for a soft

image so I chose to work with Kodak but I pulled one stop, except at night, to give a softer image.” She chose KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 for interiors and night exteriors and KODAK VISION2 100T 5212 for day exteriors. “I like Kodak because I think there is a good range of colour and I like the ‘18 because you can use it underdeveloped and it gives a really nice soft texture.”

## Two filters

To help achieve those textures, Godard used Zeiss lenses instead of her favourite Cookes. “The aperture was too high for night scenes and economically I could not have two different series of lenses,” she explains. “I also used diffusion on the camera which is quite new for me. Today’s images, even on film, have a tendency to approach what we can do in HD – a digital, hard look. I wanted something you can almost

touch.” She chose two filters in combination to achieve that effect, the Soft-Effect and the Classic Soft or Glimmer.

Godard’s biggest challenge was to show the highway with cars passing from the interior of the house and, in particular how to maintain the exterior readable. The primary difficulty was getting enough light level inside. “Slowly I managed it. ...It is so difficult to estimate contrast when you are working at such light levels and I found that very exciting. It is a delicate balance choosing how to stop down an exterior; if you get it wrong, it looks wrong. It looks too much like a studio– you don’t believe it. When I look through the camera I don’t ask, ‘Is it beautiful, is it ugly?’ It’s simply ‘Is it right – do I believe in it?’”

Godard’s interview took place just after her return from Bulgaria. Did the combination of stock, lighting and filters work? “You know I am still wondering if it will turn out,” she laughs. “I haven’t seen any images except the DVDs – I hate that because it gives you only a limited amount of information and you have to learn how to use that, so I will see! In the meantime, not being able to see anything creates an emulation, a sense of research; you have to dare to try more. I know this is a paradox but this is exactly what makes me so passionate about cinematography!”