



# THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET

A FILM BY MARIE KREUTZER

 69<sup>th</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Competition

PICTURE TREE INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS

VALERIE  
PACHNER

PIA  
HIERZEGGER

MAVIE  
HÖRBIGER

# THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET

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Feature / Austria / 2019 / 108 min  
DCP / 1:2,39 / 5.1 Surround / German

 PICTURE TREE  
INTERNATIONAL

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## SYNOPSIS

Lola is a jet-setting business consultant who excels at the aggressive tactics and nonstop work her job requires. She travels back and forth from Vienna, where her tasteful apartment serves more as mailbox and laundromat than home, to the headquarters of the latest corporation she's restructuring. Her routine is one of late nights at the office, fancy client dinners and brief nights of sleep in sterile hotel rooms. Approaching 30, Lola is beautiful, works out, and her career seems on a fast track to success.

Lola manages her personal life with the same ruthless efficiency she uses to optimize profit margins. She keeps her relationship with her boss Elise secret, as well as the existence of her older sister Conny, who has a long history of mental illness. But when she receives the news that Conny has attempted suicide, Lola's secrets threaten to explode into the open. As she tries to do what's best for her sister without jeopardizing all she's worked so hard for, Lola slowly finds her own grip on reality slipping away.





# IN CONVERSATION WITH MARIE KREUTZER

What inspired you to set *THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET* in the business consulting world, and how did you research this world to prepare the film?

I've been interested in business consulting for quite a while. My stepsister worked in consulting in her twenties and I did a short documentary about her in 2004. It was difficult though because everything concerning her work was confidential and it was not possible to film her "work world" directly. I think I already thought about a fictional story in that setting while not being able to capture it. It might be a coincidence, but I also had a difficult time in 2004, work-wise, and was very exhausted and depressed, which I couldn't really "name" at that time. Looking back I think that maybe the subject of having to function and to perform all the time related more to me than I thought, and it still does.

I had the opportunity to talk to several ex-consultants. Three of them read the script in different stages. Their feedback always came quickly, clearly, and was extremely productive. Although they didn't work as consultants anymore, the years of having to be extremely efficient were noticeable in how they worked with me, and how they talked to me. Sometimes the way the words were chosen taught me more about the world they had lived in than what they were talking about. I was not really surprised by what I heard, but what I love about research are the details and finding the tone, the colours, the texture of a universe. Of course a consultant's job is exactly what we imagine it to be, but people are only good at what they do if they believe in it, and that's what interested me. The people we are talking about are very intelligent and educated. But they are also very young and looking for a meaning in what they do.

At the same time I think the world of consulting is not far away from where most of us are. I don't have to wear a suit for work, but still there's times in my life when I cannot turn off my phone, receive twenty emails an hour and when there is no room for weakness, or at least for me it seems that way. We are all running all the time. And it's no wonder many of us are exhausted and need different kinds of treatment or drugs to deal with what society wants us to be. A psychiatrist who read the script said to me: Not 100% of Conny is mental illness and not 100% of anyone else is sane. That is what the film is about, for me: There is a darkness in all of us.

How did you develop Lola's character and her combination of hardness and vulnerability?

I can't talk much about "creating" Lola because she was just there. She is so many women I have seen. Actually women I am highly irritated by, personally. We all struggle for perfection all the time and it's sick. And those who seem to deny the fact that it's a struggle, those are the women who irritate and fascinate me at the same time.

Lola was also inspired by Hitchcock's *MARNIE*, unconsciously, but *MARNIE* came up again and again. What they have in common is their independence, their way of living without relying on anyone, refusing to see their own darkness. They are absolutely alone and that makes them characters who are also very touching und vulnerable while at the same time being so "hard". Actually *MARNIE* made me decide that Lola would have to be a Blonde.

I never judge my characters, I couldn't tell their stories if I would. I understand Lola in every moment of the film. It was a shock to me to find out late in the editing process how much of Lola is inside



me! It was at a time when the first people saw the film and reacted very, very differently and I was confronted with my fears of failing and not being good enough while blaming myself for not being home enough, working too much and working out too little. Lola cannot save Conny. Lola has to save herself. I am not saying she achieves that during this film!

It was the first time you worked with Valerie Pachner. Did she bring anything specific that changed or inflected the role?

Every actress and actor brings something specific, and a film changes with every cast decision. What I liked about Valerie was that she seemed absolutely down-to-earth, unlike Lola. She is a warm person, and I was looking for that contrast. There is nothing insecure about Valerie, at least nothing I could see! She is so "here", which is not only what makes actresses and actors really good, but something so different from Lola who's thoughts are never where her feet are. I didn't have to work much! Sometimes I made something up between takes because she was so good that I wouldn't have needed a second one. I let her try another subtext or listened to her thoughts while knowing I already had everything I needed.

Lola's sister, Conny suffers from schizophrenia. How did you research her mental illness and world of the psychiatric ward for the film?

My aunt was diagnosed with schizophrenia in her early twenties. So I unknowingly researched for decades! When I worked on the script I talked to several psychiatrists and psychologists, visited the psychiatric wards and spent time there. I mean hours, not weeks, because it's really too much if you are a sensitive person like me. I don't know any other place that is so uncanny. Literally everybody walking down the hall or sitting in a chair eating lunch seems unpredictable. But that's not only scary, it attracts me at the same time. The funny thing is that when I was asked to describe charisma once I also used the word "unpredictability".



So, that was maybe the most important thing about Conny. And although the character was already written as an unpredictable person, a person that would always make you insecure, an irritating, moody, but at the same time almost too confident woman, I had to find ways to make her even less foreseeable while shooting to REALLY irritate Valerie and other actors around her.

Do you see *THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET* in the continuity of your previous work, or does it feel like a departure from the other films you have directed?

I don't think strategically. I do what I am interested in and what I'm drawn to. Just like a consultant, I'm only good if I believe in what I do. I don't care about genre and there is no master plan of an oeuvre! The first treatment of *THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET* was already written between my first and second feature film, it just took me some time. It doesn't feel like a departure, I didn't work differently and I am surprised how different people seem to perceive it from my other films.

I always love my characters and I always love my actors. I take them seriously and I believe in the script. Every film is its own universe and I love to go with it, to be prepared and then leave all the thinking behind and just being intuitive on set. Actually a big issue during writing, shooting, and editing the film was something that is familiar to me: The fear that the main character might not be lovable for the viewer. But I had the exact same issue with Gruber in *GRUBER IS LEAVING* and Stella in *WE USED TO BE COOL*.

*Lola seems to have arranged her life perfectly and achieved 'success', but as often, it's family that catches up with her.*

Family is the best subject! Because you can't choose your family. You're born and your family history is already there. You can't create or influence it. You can leave a partner or friend but even if you leave your family, they will always be a part of you.



It's a film where we at times feel one step ahead and at others one step behind Lola. What was important to you in the film's pacing?

I hardly ever think about pacing during the shoot and I film every scene from beginning to end, no pieces, no pick-ups. Working with my editor Ulrike Kofler has maybe become my favourite part of filmmaking – it's not as stressful as shooting, I don't have to argue so much, and it's so beautiful to have all that material and make something with it.

But what you are talking about is maybe more script-related. Unpredictability was important. Not only because of suspense but because of the feeling it gives you as a viewer to never really know HOW this story is told to you. Nobody takes your hand and shows you what to think. An actor who saw the film found the end was undecided, but to me it was important to let the viewer decide. For me the end is absolutely clear.



## MARIE KREUTZER

Marie Kreutzer was born in Graz, Austria, in 1977 and studied screenwriting at the Film Academy Vienna. Her first feature length film, *THE FATHERLESS*, premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in the Panorama Special sidebar in 2011, receiving Special Mention for 'Best First Feature'. Her second film, *GRUBER IS LEAVING* (2015), was nominated for the Austrian Film Award and won Special Mention as 'Best Film' at the Zurich Film Festival. In 2016, her third feature film *WE USED TO BE COOL* also premiered at the Zurich Film Festival in competition. After finalizing her first TV movie *EMERGENCY LIES* starring Josef Hader in 2017, *THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET* is Marie Kreutzer's newest feature film as writer and director and will be premiered in the Competition of the 69th International Film Festival Berlin 2019.

- 2019 **THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET** - feature film, 108'  
*Berlinale 2019 (Competition)*
- 2017 **EMERGENCY LIES** - TV-Movie, 90'  
*based on the Screenplay by Pia Hierzegger*  
*Awarded "Best TV-Movie" - Filmfestival Biberach 2017*
- 2016 **WE USED TO BE COOL** - feature film, 96'  
*Zurich Film Festival 2016, Filmfest Hamburg 2016,*  
*Das Filmfest Prag 2016, Tallinn IFF 2016*
- 2015 **GRUBER IS LEAVING** - feature film, 104'  
*Beijing IFF 2015 – Tiantan Award for "Best Soundtrack",*  
*ROMY 2015 for "Best Camera in a Feature Film",*  
*Special Mention at the Zurich Film Festival 2015*
- 2011 **THE FATHERLESS** - feature film, 104'  
*Berlinale 2011 - Panorama Special (Special Mention "Best Debut"),*  
*Diagonale 2011 ("Best Film" and 3 more awards),*  
*Bozner Filmtage 2011 (Award for "Best Film"),*  
*IFF of New European Film Bulgaria ("Best Director" Award)*
- 2007 **CHRISTMAS SERVICE** - documentary, 25'
- 2006 **WHITE BOX** - short feature, 27'  
*Based on a story by Siri Hustvedt;*  
*Diagonale 2007: Award for the most promising young writer;*  
*Premiers Plans Angers 08*
- 2005 **7 MORTAL SINS / LETHARGY** - documentary, 25'
- 2002 **UN PEU BEAUCOUP** - short feature, 34'  
*Diagonale 2003*
- 2000 **CAPPY LEIT** - short feature, 17'  
*Diagonale 2001, Oberhausen 2001 (Award of the Children's and*  
*Youth Film Competition)*



A photograph of actress Valerie Pachner. She is wearing a dark, heavy coat over a light blue collared shirt and a dark tie. She has blonde hair pulled back and is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background is a blurred office or laboratory setting with shelves and equipment. A person's arm in a dark suit is visible on the right side of the frame.

## VALERIE PACHNER

Valerie Pachner was born 1987 in Wels, Upper Austria. She graduated from the prestigious Max Reinhardt Seminar in 2013. Valerie then became a regular cast member of the Residenztheater ensemble in Munich.

For her performance in the movie EGON SCHIELE - DEATH AND THE MAIDEN she not only received the Austrian Film Award as Best Actress but also the Romy for Best New Talent. Her new movie RADEGUND by Terrence Malick will be released in 2019. Currently Valerie is shooting the eagerly awaited prequel to the hugely successful KINGSMAN series, directed by Matthew Vaughn, alongside Ralph Fiennes, Rhys Ifans, August Diehl and Daniel Brühl.



## PIA HIERZEGGER

Born in Graz in 1972, the Austrian actress, writer and director Pia Hierzegger is one of the members of the Grazer Off-Theatre Gruppe "Theater am Bahnhof".

Hierzegger is known for movies like SLUGS, CONTACT HIGH, THE FATHERLESS or the film adaption of the novel THE BONE MAN by Wolf Haas.

With the Play "vernetzt denken" she won the Augsburg Play Competition in 2007. In the theatre season 2009/10 she dramatized the novel "Life Eternal" by Wolf Haas as a Play for the Grazer Schauspielhaus.

Her recent films include HOTEL ROCK'N'ROLL by Helmut Köpping and Michael Ostrowski, WE USED TO BE COOL by Marie Kreutzer and WILD MOUSE by Josef Hader.

Furthermore her script for the TV Film EMERGENCY LIES was filmed and directed by Marie Kreutzer.



# MAVIE HÖRBIGER

Mavie Hörbiger was born in Munich in 1979. After graduating from drama school in Munich she has had a succesful career on stage in Hannover, Bochum, Basel, Vienna, at Salzburg Festival and since 2012 as a member of the Ensemble of Burgtheater in Vienna, as well as in cinema and TV. For her role in "Diener zweier Herren" she received a nomination for the Vienna Theatre Nestroy Award.

On TV she was last seen in several "Tatort" productions and the crime thriller SPUREN DES BÖSEN: BEGIERDE (2016) by Andreas Prochaska. For the "Tatort" crime drama DIE LETZTE WIESN (2014) by Marvin Kren she received a nomination for Best Supporting Actress from the German Academy for Television. On the big screen Mavie Hörbiger last starred in BIBI & TINA 2 by Detlev Buck in 2014, AXOLOTL OVERKILL by Helene Hegemann (2015) and in two films in 2016: SOMMERHÄUSER as well as the sequel to Christian Zübert's cult film LOMMBOCK.







# NOVOTNY & NOVOTNY

Novotny & Novotny Filmproduktion is a Vienna-based film production company founded by Franz and Karin Novotny in 1995. Since October 2018 producer Alexander Glehr runs the company as sole holder and managing director. Over the last two decades we have produced award-winning feature films, documentaries, commercials and TV-series. Our aim is to develop compelling stories for a broad audience and produce films of high artistic value and significance.

We are experienced in co-producing with countries all over Europe (e.g. Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Great Britain, Czech Republic, Ukraine, France, etc.), working for an international audience as well as realizing films with commercial approach in German speaking territories and first time feature film.

We are focusing on collaborations with a wide variety of industry professionals, striving to work and build long lasting relationships with co-producers, directors, writers and distributors.

# SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2018    **ANGELO** by Markus Schleinzner  
*Toronto International Film Festival,  
San Sebastian International Film Festival,  
Busan International Film Festival*
  
- 2016    **EGON SCHIELE: DEATH AND THE MAIDEN** by Dieter Berner  
*Austrian Film Award 2017 "Best Actress" for Valerie Pachner,  
New Faces Award 2017 for Noah Saavedra,  
Romy 2017 for "Best Screenplay", "Most Promising Actors:  
Valerie Pachner & Noah Saavedra", "Best Feature Film"*
  
- 2016    **WE USED TO BE COOL** by Marie Kreutzer  
*Zurich Film Festival 2016, Filmfest Hamburg 2016,  
Das Filmfest Prag 2016, Tallinn IFF 2016*
  
- 2014    **THERAPY FOR A VAMPIRE** by David Rueh  
*Busan International Film Festival, Hofer Filmtage,  
Shanghai International Film Festival, Edinburgh Film Festival*
  
- 2013    **SICKFUCKPEOPLE** by Juri Rechinsky  
*Heart of Sarajevo Best Documentary Film - Sarajevo Film Festival  
Best Documentary Feature - Raindance Film Festival,  
Best International Documentary - DOCsDF International  
Documentary Film Festival, Vienna Film Award for Best  
Documentary – Viennale*
  
- 2011    **THE FATHERLESS** by Marie Kreutzer  
*Berlinale 2011 - Panorama Special (Special Mention "Best Debut"),  
Diagonale 2011 ("Best Film" and 3 more awards),  
Bozner Filmtage 2011 (Award for "Best Film"),  
IFF of New European Film Bulgaria ("Best Director" Award)*





# CAST

Lola  
Conny  
Elise  
Birgit  
Sebastian  
Herr Bacher  
Jürgen  
Clemens

Valerie Pachner  
Pia Hierzegger  
Mavie Hörbiger  
Michelle Barthel  
Marc Benjamin  
Axel Sichrovsky  
Dominic Marcus Singer  
Meo Wulf





## CREW

Written and directed by  
Producers

Line-Producer  
Director of Photography  
Edited by  
Production Designer  
Music by  
Costume Designer

Marie Kreutzer  
Alexander Glehr  
Franz Novotny  
Johanna Scherz  
Leena Koppe  
Ulrike Kofler  
Martin Reiter  
Kyrre Kvam  
Monika Buttinger

Makeup Design  
Production Sound Mixer  
Sound Design  
Re-recording mixer  
Production Manager  
Casting

Maike Heinlein  
Odo Grötschnig  
Veronika Hlawatsch  
Bernhard Maisch  
Gottlieb Pallendorf  
Rita Waszilovics

A production by Novotny & Novotny Filmproduktion  
Produced with financial support of Austrian Film Institute,  
Vienna Film Fund and FISA - Film Industry Support Austria  
In collaboration with ORF Film/Television Agreement



A NOVOTNY & NOVOTNY FILMPRODUKTION PRODUCTION WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MARIE KREUTZER

VALERIE PACHNER PIA HIERZEGGER MAVIE HÖRBIGER MICHELLE BARTHEL MARC BENJAMIN AXEL SICHROVSKY DOMINIC MARCUS SINGER MEO WULF

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LEENA KOPPE EDITED BY ULRIKE KOFLER PRODUCTION DESIGNER MARTIN REITER MUSIC BY KYRRE KVAM COSTUME DESIGNER MONIKA BUTTINGER

MAKEUP DESIGN MAIKE HEINLEIN CASTING RITA WASZILOVICS SOUND MIXER ODO GRÖTSCHNIG SOUND DESIGN VERONIKA HLAWATSCH RE-RECORDING MIXER BERNHARD MAISCH

PRODUCTION MANAGER GOTTLIEB PALLENDORF LINE PRODUCER JOHANNA SCHERZ PRODUCED BY ALEXANDER GLEHR FRANZ NOVOTNY

