



# THE CITY BELOW

a film by christoph hochhäusler



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# SYNOPSIS

A man and a woman at an art exhibition share a fleeting moment of attraction, which neither can act upon. Days later, a chance second meeting leads to an innocent coffee and the two strangers – both married – toy with their unexplainable fascination for each other. Svenja is curious and finds herself in a hotel room with Roland, but she does not consummate an affair. A powerful executive at the large bank where Svenja's husband works, Roland is used to getting what he wants. He manipulates the transfer of her husband to Indonesia to replace a recently murdered bank manager. Unaware of Roland's actions, Svenja now ceases to resist... From the director of I AM GUILTY aka LOW PROFILE (FALSCHER BEKENNER) and THIS VERY MOMENT (MILCHWALD).



# COMMENTS from christoph hochhäusler

**unexplainable attraction** When Roland's wife eventually confronts him about his affair, he says: "I have no name for it." We all consider ourselves rational animals, but we are not, actually. Not the slightest bit. Love might be a deal, but attraction is primal. You meet someone, anyone, and instantly you know you could love or hate him or her. The first thing we know is feeling. That's dangerous, but despite what we believe, all the logic in the world can't protect us from animal instinct. For me, cinema is all about this kind of danger.

**longing for the opposite** Svenja and Roland are not on the same social level, and they never will be. He's part of corporate aristocracy, and he married into old money for a reason. His whole life is dedicated to the game and its rules. He loves deals and deals love him. Svenja's game is life. She could not care less for the game of big finance. There is this famous phrase by artist Maurizio Nannucci: "You can imagine the opposite." For me, it means that the opposite follows us, like a shadow, like a nihilistic desire to break up with the comfort we have surrounded us with. We want to get real, to wake up. It's a confrontational thing. We have the hope to be awakened by someone, an opposite force. One longs for the opposite. This is perhaps the heart of the film. It's really about losing touch with reality, and about the counter reaction, attaining reality in love, in the body.

**svenja** I have always seen Svenja as someone coming from a floating, unsteady life. Someone for whom it is difficult to say no. Not out of weakness, she is just open, curious to see what will happen next. Unlike her husband Oliver, who is driven by an image, an idea of a life he wants to achieve. But what's fascinating is how Svenja manages to confuse Roland's – and our – imagination again and again. Svenja is no victim, no puppet on a string.

**roland** Roland can shape the world to suit his will, at least for some time. He is well aware of his attraction to Svenja and he plays with it right from the start. But he will be taken by surprise that the affair actually matters to him. What comes as a surprise, or more precise: as an accident, is the momentum, the gravity of his feelings.

**a challenge and a mirror** Svenja is Roland's equal. The only reason she is interesting for him. As a challenge and as a mirror. They resemble each other in their deep sense of loss. They both have no firm ground beneath their feet. Something binds them, but I don't think these two will grow old together.



**how power affects love** The film is inspired by the biblical story of David and Bathsheba in its basic outline, but with a capitalist aspect. That was the basic idea that I presented to my co-screenwriter Ulrich Peltzer. Someone uses his power for his love and at the same time destroys his love with it. It was just material for us. Many other things were added. This is what I found interesting: How power affects the longing for what we call love. Power transcends (or corrupts) ideology, beliefs, bonds. Power is all about action. Not unlike children destroying sand castles, the powerful love nothing more than the proof of their force.

**the banking world** During our screenplay research, we read books and articles on the banking world – and this was long before the crisis – partly tell-all books, but also a few basics. Then through friends and acquaintances, we met and interviewed middle and executive bankers, all the way up to the CEO. It was very exciting to penetrate and delve into this world. The biggest surprise was to see how irrationally this “cutting edge of capitalism” functions, how unpredictable it is also for those who are allegedly steering it. The crisis finally seemed almost logical... in terms of a correction of an unreliable narrative, a world of numbers that simply couldn't care less for reality. Because feedback from the factual world is less direct, an incorrect assessment may take years to have an impact. By then, those responsible have long since moved on to other companies.

**fierce competitiveness** “Résumés!” says Roland at one point and means it contemptuously. The question of what résumés mean gradually developed into a leitmotif. At one point, a board member says that Oliver's CV is AAA+. That's what it's all about: everything is rated and evaluated... Fierce competitiveness applies to every large company, but it's perhaps more extreme in the banking sector because it's strictly about money, especially in investment banking. Because everyone is working against everyone else, also within their own companies, departments can be systematically provided with one-sided reports, and the result is an unreliable narrative. These are the so-called “meeting report wars”. Competition as a narrative system does not promote the truth, but rather many stories with happy endings, in any case from the perspective of the respective author. If you project this distortion onto the overall market, and given that accountants and rating agencies fail as correctives because they are hopelessly dependent on the firms they are supposed to evaluate, one can imagine very well how the crisis emerged.

**frankfurt** Frankfurt, where the story is set, also plays a role in the film. I know the city very well, but I have never lived there. I'm not a native and I don't want to sound that way when I describe a place. The only city that I could speak about as a native is Munich. I've been living in Berlin for 10 years and I know a lot about its history, etc., but when you grow up in a city you naturally get more intimate perspectives. Nevertheless, there's a lot in the film that is typical of Frankfurt: money, art, drugs... Frankfurt is Germany's banking center, and as a banking location the number two in





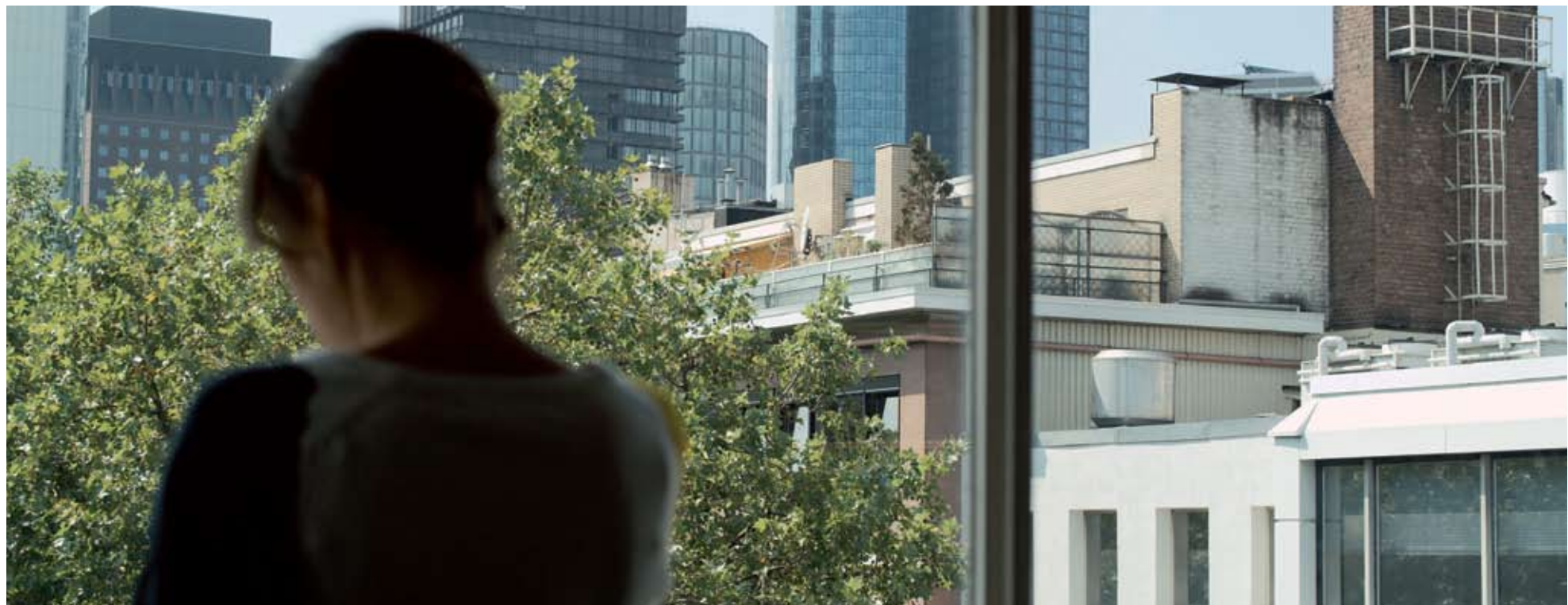
Europe. And it's a "global city", a place just big enough that anything could happen there. Like our story. What I like about this town is contrast. It's both very small and very international, it's grounded in the tradition of Hesse, but tries so hard to be an American city. In many ways, what makes it modern is that it is a fantasy, a simulation.

**art and culture in frankfurt** There is a lot of money in this town – which is why there are a lot of fine art museums and galleries. Culture seems to be not the antidote, but the cover for big business there. The banks want to show off their wealth. At Deutsche Bank, the heavyweight player of German banking, every floor has its distinct art program – the higher you go, the more expensive the art works. You can tell by the artist in your office the level you have reached, career-wise. In Roland's office in the film, we see works by German artist Günther Förg – the market prices for these paintings equal our production budget. We were able to borrow them thanks to the generous support of the artist. Rolf Breuer, former CEO of Deutsche Bank, had Förg works in his office, too. We tried to be realistic and searched for a mix that is fitting for that world, not one that caters to my personal taste. And all the works of art seen in the film are originals.

**a life in glass cases** The banking world in the film is basically living and working in glass cases. Transparency always sounds so promising, but in effect, it often only means control. In a glass building, you can no longer hide a short well-deserved office nap. And this control is what triggers the longing for a greedy, dirty life. Today

in everyday life, glass surrounds us. In the past, under the table was an off-limits area, a realm of freedom. But with so many glass tables these days, I have to watch out that I'm not wearing the wrong socks. A major theme both in photography and production design was "reflection", which in practical terms means glass. Glass creates an illusionary effect – because the world seems close, but it is out of reach, out of touch. The way we create "reality" in our minds is closely connected with the activity of our hands. We verify with hands. Production designer Tim Pannen gave Roland's office an even more unreal feeling by using white carpets. They create this weightless feeling when you look down on the city from the 27th floor.

**the crisis will eventually arrive on the streets** One of the reasons investment bankers think of themselves so highly (and so lowly of others) lies in the fact that competition is so fierce that battlefield analogies are somewhat justified. They are warriors, or, to be more precise, mercenaries, fully aware of the fact that their actions can kill bonds, companies, countries and what not. What is disturbing are the increasing repercussions on everyday life. A phrase that played a role for the film's ending was: The crisis will eventually arrive on the streets. This is both a threat and a hope. What is happening does matter, and things have consequences, that no one can permanently escape.





# BIOGRAPHIES

**christoph hochhäusler** Born 1972 in Munich, Germany. Studied architecture at TU, Berlin and film direction at HFF, Munich. He is also founder and co-publisher of the film magazine Revolver. His films include: FEVER (FIEBER, Short Movie 1999), THIS VERY MOMENT (MILCHWALD, 2003), LOW PROFILE (FALSCHER BEKENNER, 2005), SÉANCE (Segment of DEUTSCHLAND 09, 2009), THE CITY BELOW (UNTER DIR DIE STADT, 2010)



**nicolette krebitz** Born in Berlin in 1972, has been in front of the camera since 1982. Since then she has performed in various productions for film, TV and theater, had her own band, and composed together with her colleagues the soundtrack to the road movie BANDITS. At the age of 23 she received her second Adolf Grimme Award, as well as a Golden Record (1998) and the Bavarian Film Award (for Best Music). In 2004 she received her second Golden Camera award for her performance in Vivian Naefe's feature SO SCHNELL DU KANNST.

Apart from her work as an actress Nicolette Krebitz has produced and directed her own films since 2001, such as JEANS and THE HEART IS A DARK FOREST. Her shortfilm THE UNFINISHED (DIE UNVOLLENDETE) was part of the shortfilm compilation GERMANY 09 that premiered at the Berlinale 2009.

## Filmography (Selection)

2010 THE CITY BELOW (UNTER DIR DIE STADT) by Christoph Hochhäusler

2008 LIEBESLIED by Anne Høegh Krohn

2003 ZWISCHEN TAG UND NACHT by Nicolai Rohde

2002 SO SCHNELL DU KANNST by Vivian Naefe

2000 THE TUNNEL by Roland Suzo Richter

1996 BANDITS by Katja von Garnier

1994 AUSGERECHNET ZOÉ by Markus Imboden



**robert hunger-bühler** After attending the Schauspielakademie Zürich and completing Theater and Philosophy studies in Vienna, Hunger-Bühler worked as an actor and director in Vienna, Bonn, Düsseldorf and Freiburg. He also worked at the Freie Volksbühne Berlin, the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, the Berliner Ensemble and the Burgtheater Wien.

He worked with several directors including Jossi Wieler, Jürgen Kruse, Frank Castorf, Andrea Breth, Claus Peymann, Luc Bondy, Barbara Frey, Stefan Pucher, Johan Simons, Klaus Michael Grüber, Peter Zadek and Christoph Marthaler. In Peter Stein's legendary production of "Faust", Hunger-Bühler played the role of Mephisto

He has played in various film and TV productions, a selection includes: GIER (Dieter Wedel), CASANOVA (Richard Blank), DANNI (Martin Gies), TATORT (TV), POLIZEIRUF (TV), DER REDENSCHREIBER (Julia Albrecht, Busso von Müller), BINGO (Markus Imboden).

Since the 2001/02 season, Robert has been a member of the ensemble at the Schauspielhaus Zürich. Since 2001, he is also a member of the Akademie für Darstellende Künste Berlin.

# CAST & CREW

**svenja steve** Nicolette Krebitz  
**roland cordes** Robert Hunger-Bühler  
**oliver steve** Mark Waschke  
**claudia cordes** Corinna Kirchhoff  
**andrew lau** Van-Lam Vissay  
**werner löbau** Wolfgang Böck  
**hermann josef esch** Paul Faßnacht  
**uwe maas** Oliver Broumis  
**frank kressnick** Robert Schupp  
**stefan scharf** André Dietz  
**hartmut john** Michael Abendroth  
**gordon parker** Johannes Kiebranz  
**markus de hadlen** Klaus Zmorek  
**britta lau** Alexandra Finder  
**dr. silbereisen** Alexandra von Schwerin  
**marianne suhren** Heike Trinker  
**annika lebert** Angelika Bartsch  
**jens janssen** Piet Fuchs

**director** Christoph Hochhäusler  
**screenplay** Ulrich Peltzer, Christoph Hochhäusler  
**dop** Bernhard Keller  
**editor** Stephan Stabenow  
**production design** Tim Pannen  
**costume design** Birgitt Kilian  
**casting** Ulrike Müller  
**make-up** Astrid Weber  
**sound recordist** Michael Busch  
**music** Benedikt Schiefer  
**sounddesign** Rainer Heesch  
**sound mix** Matthias Lempert  
**postproduction supervisor** Niko Remus  
**production manager** Rüdiger Jordan  
**line producer** Sascha Verhey  
**commissioning editor** Michael André (WDR),  
Birgit Kämper (arte)  
**producer** Bettina Brokemper

**technical data** 35 mm / 1:2,35 / 110 mins  
Dolby Digital SRD / Colour  
German with English subtitles

**a production of** Heimatfilm GmbH + Co. KG  
**in co-production with** WDR-Arte  
**with support from** Filmstiftung NRW,  
HessenInvestFilm, Deutscher Filmförderfonds

HEIMATFILM



arte

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