

Playing Garbo

How Marlene Dietrich Conquered Hollywood

HOW AND WHY DID Hollywood become interested in Marlene Dietrich? In March 1933, *Photoplay's* answer was a rhetorical question: "Wasn't it Von [Sternberg] who found her as a struggling nobody in Germany and with his genius' eye perceived her possibilities?" ("Is it Goodbye?" 16). It is commonly believed that Dietrich's career began with the overnight success of the German film *The Blue Angel* and the image that von Sternberg created for her with it, that von Sternberg discovered Dietrich as a nobody in Germany, and that he brought her to Hollywood and made her an international star. This story is echoed not only by many biographers but by von Sternberg and Dietrich themselves. Von Sternberg claimed: "I then put her into the crucible of my conception, blended her image to correspond with mine, pouring lights on her until the alchemy was complete" (qtd. in Dietrich, *Marlene* 70). Dietrich agreed: "He created me" (Dietrich, *Marlene* 79).

In what follows I argue that this story is a legend, by confronting it with facts from contemporary sources and by interpreting these facts within film industry contexts of the late 1920s and early 1930s in Germany and in the United States. Unfortunately, no documents that would be of help in this task can be found in the Marlene Dietrich Collection in Berlin or in the Paramount Collection at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles. Marlene Dietrich collected a huge number of things, but she destroyed everything that did not fit the legend she

cultivated all her life.¹ However, the films Dietrich made before she met von Sternberg, as well as published primary sources such as newspaper and fan magazine articles, film reviews, and popularity polls on films and stars, give enough evidence to suggest a different story.

I would like to show that prior to *The Blue Angel*, Dietrich modeled her image on Greta Garbo, using Garbo's high status with American and international audiences to attract Hollywood's attention. Since Paramount had already been searching for a competitor for MGM's Swedish star, they saw their "new Garbo" in Dietrich. Paramount was then able to create a unique image for Dietrich by distinguishing Dietrich's Garbo-like image from Garbo's own image. This unique image became an icon for decades. Thus, neither von Sternberg nor his film *The Blue Angel* were directly responsible for Hollywood's interest in Marlene Dietrich.

The film industry cannot make stars; it can only nominate the candidates for election by its audience (as Francesco Alberoni has put it ["The Powerless 'Elite'" 84]). Film stars are unique actors who arouse a special interest in their audience.² "Uniqueness" means that stars are readily distinguishable from one another, and a "special interest" simply means that some actors are preferred over others. My primary focus here is not the question of how Dietrich became a star, that is, how and why she became popular with audiences, but how she became a "candidate" for stardom.

My analysis of Dietrich is relevant for a topic that is central to star studies, namely the question of cultural agency in the creation of popular icons. I will show that the account of von Sternberg as the single creator of Dietrich is only a myth that accords with common ideologies, but that in reality, different individuals and institutions of a specific culture and historical period (in this case, the German and U.S. star systems of the 1920s) interacted in a complex manner. As a rule, if the audience itself does not single out an actor or actress, for example, by writing fan letters in response to a new face, then a studio will nominate a new actor or actress for election by the audience. For this purpose, a studio may initially adopt the strategy of imitation, that is, it will adapt the well-established image of a top star from one of its competitors. Later on, when the studio's new star is successful, it will aim to distinguish the new star from the original.

When a film studio initiates an international search for a candidate with star potential, actors or actresses aiming for stardom may attract

attention to themselves by imitating an established star. This is possible and especially likely under production conditions in which actors and actresses themselves are responsible for creating and promoting their images, as was the case in the German film industry of the 1920s.

Thus, a candidate for stardom may be offered to audiences either through the initiative of a film company or the agency of candidates themselves. In Dietrich's case both interests interacted in the process of nomination, that is, her own ambition to become a great international star, as well as Paramount's aim to compete with MGM.

Playing Garbo: How Dietrich Planned to Conquer Hollywood

In her German films of the 1920s, Dietrich imitated Garbo, who was under contract to MGM, in order to attract the attention of the U.S. film industry, and Paramount responded, because it was looking for a competitor. To fully understand this process, one needs to have a basic understanding of the German cinema of the time. The German film industry of the 1920s produced a very successful national cinema. The film market was economically determined by a large number of small production companies, which competed fiercely. Star actors and actresses were usually independent, that is, they were employed on a film-by-film basis and had personal control of their images (see Garncarz, "Art and Industry").

Contrary to Dietrich's own claims, her film career began in 1922; she had already appeared in sixteen German silent films before *The Blue Angel*. Most of the roles were only bit parts, but in 1929 she played leading roles in four feature films. These films are, in chronological order of their release, *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame* (I Kiss Your Hand, Ma'am, released 17 January 1929), *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt* (The Woman You Long For, released 29 April 1929), *Das Schiff der verlorenen Menschen* (The Ship of Lost Souls, released 17 September 1929), and *Gefahren der Brautzeit* (The Dangers of Engagement, released 21 February 1930).

The production companies of the first two of these films, Super Film and Terra-Film respectively, had not wanted Dietrich as a leading lady at all. In both cases the directors, not the companies, had proposed her for these roles. The director Robert Land insisted on Marlene Dietrich

for *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame* “in spite of the producer’s and the distributor’s warnings and protests” (Aros, *Marlene Dietrich*). Kurt (later “Curtis”) Bernhardt, the director of *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt*, remembered: “She was breathtakingly beautiful. But it was a hell of a lot of trouble to sell her to the executives at Terra-Film. They said, ‘Who is Marlene Dietrich? Nobody knows her.’ But I succeeded in the end.”³

Marlene Dietrich was not yet a star in Germany prior to *The Blue Angel*. Since stars are actors who are singled out from the mass of actors by the audience, the best evidence for judging who may be considered a star are popularity polls. Unfortunately, such audience surveys do not exist for 1929. However, the publicity was just beginning to mention Dietrich, and she was always considered “a movie debutante” (Hans G. Lustig, qtd. in Gandert 306) in these early years.

Dietrich’s first performances in leading roles convinced the vast majority of film critics of her potential for stardom. Typical are the following two comments from contemporary German film reviews: “Rarely does a beginner show such charming prospects” (Hans G. Lustig, qtd. in Gandert 306) and “Only Marlene Dietrich is worth mentioning; her cool, ladylike poise offers proof of an unusual talent for motion pictures” (Hans Sahl, qtd. in Gandert 306).⁴

As many critics noticed, Marlene Dietrich was already imitating Greta Garbo in *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame* and *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt*. Garbo was considered a goddess, a beautiful temptress, unattainable and mysterious. In accordance with this image Dietrich’s acting was heavily stylized, and she refused to reveal information about her private life. As early as May 1929, one of the many German critics who immediately noticed the similarity between Dietrich and Garbo wrote: “Let women speak! ‘She’s sooooo sweet’—their lips pucker up when they stand in front of Marlene Dietrich’s pictures in the lobby. And the men agree to this plain and simple, but nonetheless aptly formulated judgment. They eagerly absorb any traces of Greta Garbo wherever they can be found: in the gliding, almost somnambulant manner of movement; in the heavy, slow raising of the eyelids and their staying half-closed; in the dreamlike, tired falling into a gesture; and the relaxed, playful lethargy that seems to reverently combine innocence and vice. Minor innocence, minor vice in Marlene Dietrich, though. But Garbo administers such a strong feminine narcotic that it is intoxicating even in small doses. And yet Marlene Die-

trich does not imitate; she even carefully avoids doing so” (Frank Maraun, qtd. in Gandert 217).

In one important respect, however, this review is an exception: most of the German critics who remarked that Dietrich’s performance was an imitation of Garbo’s style did not approve of this “copycat” practice. For example, one critic reviewing *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame* wrote: “Marlene Dietrich is a valuable new discovery and she is a promising talent; if only the directors would release her from that strained Garbo-pose as soon as possible” (Burger 23). Similar remarks were made about Dietrich’s second film of 1929, *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt*: “Here she is supposed to play Garbo, for whom German film longs. Styled to intoxicating magic. A pity. Otherwise perfectly suited for motion pictures” (Ernst Blauf, qtd. in Gandert 218).⁵ The German critics disapproved of Dietrich’s assuming “another’s persona,” and they asked: “Why do they paste the Swedish actress’ hairdo onto the German Marlene Dietrich, and why do they put her into Garbo’s outfits? Why don’t they bring out this woman’s own personality instead of forcing another’s on her?” (Hans G. Lustig, qtd. in Gandert 306).

The German critics who strongly disliked Dietrich’s imitation of Garbo did not discuss her reasons for adopting this strategy. By adopting Garbo’s image, however, Dietrich wasn’t trying to convince the critics of her acting abilities, but to become as successful as the established star. As early as October 1929, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* presented the German actresses Marlene Dietrich and Brigitte Helm together with Greta Garbo on its cover and claimed in the caption of the related article: “Doppelgängerinnen—Angleichung an die Erfolgreichste” (Doppelgangers—Copying the Biggest Hit).

But to whom did Dietrich direct her borrowed image? Dietrich may have targeted the sophisticated Berlin audience, but it is unlikely that she aimed to please the German audience at large. Berlin liked Dietrich as a new Garbo. (In early 1930, there was even a private school in Berlin, directed by Eris D. Monisch, that wanted to teach young women how to dress and behave like Garbo.) The average German moviegoer, however, disliked lascivious actresses, as is evidenced by the lists of top stars. Even Garbo herself was not a major star in Germany during this period: she was not among the top ten of the most popular female stars in Germany, and of her sixteen films released in Germany between 1926 and 1932, only

two, *Love and Mysterious Lady*, were successful in commercial terms.⁶ This is not surprising, because in those years there still existed a great cultural gap between German tastes in the capital and in the provinces. Consequently, it is likely that the films in which Dietrich was the leading lady found favor with their audience in Berlin but not in Germany at large. Judging by the annual lists of the fifty top-grossing films in Germany, Dietrich's films from 1929 did not meet the general audience's tastes.⁷ Only *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame* was successful; the reason for this, however, was probably not Marlene Dietrich but Harry Liedtke, who was the darling of Germany's young female audience at the time (see Garnicarz, "Top Ten Stars" 228).

But if Dietrich's Garbo-like image could hope to find favor with only a small segment of the German audience, who, then, was its primary addressee? I argue that Dietrich's image was, from the outset, actually addressed to Hollywood and its international audiences. Indeed, Germany's film intelligentsia of the period believed that Garbo, in contrast to Germany's top stars of the period, was truly international: "Through the extraordinary prominence of Hollywood films, the Garbo-type has become a big international fashion"; "The world loves Greta Garbo,"⁸ was the German critics' credo. Since Germany's film audiences did not like lascivious actresses, the critics said that the German actress Dietrich was "not typically German" at all (Lustig, qtd. in Gandert 306). They even speculated that "Dietrich would be a delightful actress in America, full of unaffected charm" (Ernst Blauf, qtd. in Gandert 218). I cannot prove that Dietrich knew that MGM's American competitors were searching for a new Garbo, nor do I know if Germany's papers picked up this fact. But since contemporary magazines clearly stressed that it was Hollywood that made Garbo an international star, it would definitely have made sense for someone who wanted to become as successful as Garbo to try to attract Hollywood's attention.⁹

When we ask who motivated Dietrich to play Garbo and thus to address Hollywood, we find several possible candidates, namely, the directors of her films of 1929 and the actress herself. As noted above, in the German film industry of the 1920s, the actresses and actors themselves were responsible for the creation and promotion of their images. Dietrich was able to control her image because she worked as a freelancer and the production companies contracted her on a film-by-film basis. As Géza

"Doppelgangers: Copying the Biggest Hit." Greta Garbo, the great Swedish-American film star, and two German actresses who adopted the same type of role, Marlene Dietrich (top right) and Brigitte Helm (bottom right). Front page of the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, October 27,

Illustrirte Zeitung, October 27, 1929.



"Sex appeal" as a school subject. In Eris D. Momisch's school in Berlin, students are taught how to resemble their great idol, Greta Garbo, in expression and manner. *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, March 30, 1930.

von Cziffra reports in his autobiography, it was initially very difficult for Dietrich to get a role: "At that time there were hardly any managers in the film industry, and so I persuaded a young man, who knew everyone who was anyone in the business, to manage Marlene. The young man's name was Max Pick" (147). Von Cziffra relates how they got Marlene cast with much effort in *Sein größter Bluff* (*His Greatest Bluff*; released 12 May 1927) and *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame*. However, it is unlikely that von Cziffra or Pick significantly influenced Dietrich's image, because otherwise von Cziffra, who was never modest about his achievements, would surely have mentioned the fact.

Dietrich's status as an actress in 1920s Germany, then, was not at all unusual. Furthermore, Dietrich's image is basically the same in the two films to which the German critics refer when comparing Dietrich to Garbo, and these films had different directors and different production companies. Thus, it must have been Dietrich herself who was mainly responsible for creating her image of a young Garbo.

Of course Dietrich's directors may also have contributed to her Garbo image. For instance, it is possible that the director of *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame*, Robert Land, originally came up with the idea, but there is no evidence of this. We do know, however, that Dietrich often resisted taking direction. She wanted to do more than just play the roles given to her: She did her best to present herself in the most favorable way. As Kurt Bernhardt, the director of *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt*, remembered: "I wanted her to simply turn to her partner. But there was nothing to be done. From the start, she knew exactly how important lighting was and how her snub nose must be lit. . . . Charles Higham [who published a biography of Dietrich in 1977] told me that she still has that habit (which is no fun for a director) of turning her face to the spotlight. She speaks to her partner indirectly and stays in that position if she believes that the lighting demands it."¹⁰

Combating the Real Garbo: Why Dietrich Won a Paramount Contract

It is clear from the sources quoted above that Dietrich imitated Garbo to attract Hollywood's attention. But how did Hollywood react to this? My

argument is that Paramount awarded a contract to Dietrich because the studio saw in her the type needed to compete with MGM's star Garbo.

In the course of a few years, Garbo had become a major star at MGM; by 1929, she had starred in eleven movies for that studio. Due to a lack of audience surveys for this period, we cannot determine exactly how popular Garbo was as a star.¹¹ However, there can hardly be any doubt that Garbo must have been well known and popular, otherwise it would not make sense that Garbo's weekly salary was raised to ten times its original amount during this period. As *The Saturday Evening Post* put it in May 1931: "When the talking pictures came crashing in and Greta first turned vocal, large billboards of the land bore simply and almost chastely two words, which might be read afar: Greta Talks. There was no detail in small type, no addenda; just simply and majestically, Greta Talks; or maybe it was Garbo Talks: the advertisers assuming quietly that the information conveyed was the same as 'Hoover elected,' 'Mars inhabited,' 'death inevitable,' or any other fundamental two-word fact in Nature" (Condon 29).

Despite this evident popularity, Garbo's films were, between 1932 and 1937, much less popular with American than with foreign audiences, with Germany probably being an exception (as noted above). Garbo's films *Camille*, *Queen Christina*, *Grand Hotel*, *Anna Karenina*, *Mata Hari*, *Conquest*, and *Painted Veil* generated greater box office overseas than in the U.S. domestic market (Sedgwick 148, table 1).

Nevertheless, because MGM was, by and large, very successful in promoting Garbo, Paramount tried to get a foothold in the market by looking for a new Garbo. As the American magazine *Pictorial Review* explained retrospectively in 1933: "Strangely enough, without Garbo there would be no Dietrich in the American movies today. Miss Dietrich was the answer to a rival company's long, exhaustive search for a personality that might combat the Swedish star's appeal."¹² Since Garbo's MGM films were more popular in foreign countries than in the United States, Paramount may have wanted to use its new Garbo specifically to expand its appeal on export markets.

How was the search for a personality that might compete with Garbo undertaken, and how was Dietrich discovered in the process? The Berlin correspondent of *Variety*, C. Hooper Trask, must have attended the premiere of Dietrich's film *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt* on 29 April

1929, since he reported a few days later, on 12 May 1929: "A discovery of a female star is something for a German film to accomplish. Here Marlene Dietrich shows herself as a strong contender for international honors" (Trask, "Woman Longed For" 24).¹³ And he accurately anticipated how Dietrich would come to be presented in her first American movies: "At the moment she is imitating Greta Garbo's half closed eyes and languorous eroticism, but there is enough individuality in her work to show that the girl is there. She has the right face and figure and she can troupe" ("Woman Longed For" 24). In addition, Donald Spoto, one of Dietrich's biographers, claims (without giving any evidence for his statement, unfortunately), that "the Berlin representatives of at least two Hollywood studios—Paramount and Universal—cabled home to report on a new international star" (50).

A few months later, in early September 1929, *Die Frau, nach der man sich sehnt* was released as *Three Loves in the United States*. It was the first film with Marlene Dietrich in a leading role ever to be shown in America. *The New York Times*, underlining Hollywood's special interest, wrote: "*Three Loves* possesses the kind of direction that makes American film magnates cable contracts abroad, and pictorial solidarity that comes only once in a while from foreign studios. In addition it boasts of a noteworthy performer in the person of Fritz Kortner and a rare Garboesque beauty in Marlene Dietrich" ("*Three Loves*").

Dietrich claimed on 13 February 1930 that after "long-pending negotiations" Paramount had at last given her a contract: "Paramount had *heard* [*sic*] my English version of *The Blue Angel* and consequently engaged me" (*Film-Kurier*, 14 February 1930). As far as I can determine, the Paramount executives could not have seen more than a few scenes of *The Blue Angel*, since a rough cut of the English version was not finished before 7 April 1930, and after this screening parts of it had to be redubbed and some scenes even had to be reshot (Sudendorf, "*Blue Angel*"). (As Patrice Petro claims in her contribution in this volume, this was probably done because Paramount executives wanted the English version to be sexually less explicit, in accordance with American censors and audiences.) This did not matter much, however, since the talent scouts were not interested in the film itself, but simply wanted to hear Dietrich speak English. A new Garbo without adequate proficiency in the English language would not have been an acceptable candidate, because by this time the industry

was already completing its transition to sound. The Paramount executives were apparently satisfied, since they signed Dietrich on 20 February 1930 in Berlin.¹⁴ According to Sudendorf it was Sydney R. Kent himself, Paramount's president, who closed the deal.¹⁵

The studio planned to pick up Dietrich's image as a young Garbo created in the German films she made prior to *The Blue Angel*, especially *Three Loves. Morocco*, her first American film, even tells a story very similar to that of *Three Loves* about a woman between two men, and in it Dietrich is as mysterious and seductive as she is in *Three Loves*. Marlene Dietrich explained retrospectively, "*The Blue Angel* was something completely different, the role of an ordinary, brazen, sexy and impetuous floozie, the very opposite of the 'mysterious woman' that von Sternberg wanted me to play in *Morocco*" (Dietrich, *Marlene* 77). Consequently, the Paramount executives bought *The Blue Angel* but did not release it before *Morocco* had been shown, since they were afraid that Dietrich's image of the "ordinary, brazen, sexy and impetuous floozie" might damage her career (Dietrich, *Marlene* 69). (*Morocco* was released on 14 November 1930 and *The Blue Angel* on 5 December 1930.) Paramount's marketing strategy proved to be well founded, since *Morocco* can be found on the U.S. list of top-grossing movies of 1930–31, but not *The Blue Angel* (Steinberg 339).

Creating a Unique Image for Dietrich: Departing from Playing Garbo

After having contracted her, Paramount further cultivated Dietrich's Garbo-like image. Thus, the Dietrich-as-a-young-Garbo-ploy that was at first addressed primarily to the producers now became the cornerstone of Dietrich's publicity. Regardless of whether it was Paramount or Dietrich herself who was mainly responsible for this publicity campaign, this strategy was very successful. *Photoplay* reported in February 1931: "The battle of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich—one of the most ferocious in the history of the screen—is now raging" (Leonhard Hall, qtd. in Griffith 14). But the discourse not only changed its addressee, it also changed its function: Dietrich no longer needed to content herself with proving that she was just as good as Garbo; she now tried to "threaten Garbo's

throne,” as *Photoplay* announced as early as December 1930, just a few days after *Morocco* was released (Albert 60).

This media battle started the moment Dietrich arrived in the States. Dietrich left Berlin for Hollywood on 1 April 1930, the day *The Blue Angel* premiered in Berlin. She arrived in New York on 9 April (according to the *New York Times* she was one of the “well-known passengers” on the *Bremen*, an express liner belonging to the north German shipping company Lloyds [“Eight Liners Due” 23]). On her arrival she was asked by a reporter whether she admired Garbo.¹⁶ Dietrich answered that she had loved Garbo’s pictures when she was young (which is probably not true).¹⁷ With this remark she wanted to give the impression that Garbo was much older (which is definitely not true).¹⁸ Since Garbo was well known from silent movies, Dietrich wanted to give the impression that she had never made any silent films herself (which, again, is not true).

After it nominates a new actor or actress for stardom by adapting the well-established image of an existing, successful star, the studio has to differentiate the new star’s image from the old one to make it unique. Dietrich would not have had the chance to become a major star by simply being Garbo’s “copycat” (Leonhard Hall, qtd. in Griffith 16). In July 1930—neither *Morocco* nor *The Blue Angel* had yet been released in the United States—Dietrich was still being presented as Garboesque: “Two portraits of quite a batch of young ladies. The girl on the left is a lot like the late lamented Jeanne Eagels, about the nose and brow, and there’s a hint of Phyllis Haver. The lady on the right is very much Garbo. Both are Marlene Dietrich, new Paramount player from Germany” (*Photoplay*, qtd. in Griffith 13). After *Morocco* had been released, *Vanity Fair* wrote: “Now that Marlene Dietrich, the German star who is Garbo’s serious rival, has come along and started doing exactly the same thing, those who saw Miss Garbo in *Romance* and Miss Dietrich in *Morocco* . . . are beginning to feel a little plaintive about it” (“Both Members”). Consequently, the publicity began to change significantly by painstakingly differentiating Dietrich from Garbo. *Photoplay* wrote in February 1931: “And here’s the unwitting, or innocent, cause of the great Garbo-Dietrich war now raging—the beautiful Marlene herself. Do you think she looks like Garbo—that she’s *trying* to resemble Garbo the Great? True, she’s blonde, beautiful, mysterious and alluring. But so are several others. We vote that Marlene Dietrich is Marlene Dietrich, and no copy of anyone!” (Leonhard Hall, qtd. in Grif-



“ . . . very much Garbo.”
Photoplay, July 1930.



“Do you think she looks like Garbo—that she’s *trying* to resemble Garbo the Great?”
Photoplay, February 1931.

fifth 15). Thus, by denying that Dietrich wanted to be like Garbo, even if she still resembled her, the discourse began to differentiate Dietrich from Garbo and to create a unique image. This strategy, playing Garbo and then departing from it, was obviously successful, since two of Dietrich's first three American-made films were very popular with American audiences, namely, *Morocco* in 1930–31 and *Shanghai Express* in 1932 (Steinberg 339).

Thus the account that Dietrich's career began with the overnight success of *The Blue Angel* and the image that von Sternberg created for her with this film seems to have little basis in fact. In contrast, as I have argued, Dietrich herself had already created a specific star image (that of a young Garbo) through her leading roles prior to *The Blue Angel*, and the main purpose of this strategy was attracting Hollywood's attention. Paramount became interested in Dietrich because the studio was looking for a star who could compete with Garbo's success at MGM.

The story of von Sternberg who discovered the unknown Dietrich for *The Blue Angel*, brought her to Hollywood and made her famous, is just a legend. But why has the legend about Dietrich's rise to stardom become so popular and durable? When a public figure aims to win the adulation of a majority of people within a given society at a given time, it is necessary to conform to that society's dominant ideology. First, the Dietrich legend refers to patriarchal ideology; the story of Pygmalion, as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, provides the mythical model for Sternberg's relationship to Dietrich. Second, the legend refers to the American dream; it is a version of the rags-to-riches story: Marlene, a nobody from Germany, came to America and found fame and wealth. And last but not least, it is a story about Hollywood itself: Hollywood as the sole creator of true international stars. Thus the legend offered what Marlene Dietrich's eager fans, as well as many of her critics, wanted to believe.

Notes

Translation by Annemone Ligansa. The translations from German into English are original to this essay, unless otherwise indicated. I would like to thank Werner Sudendorf (Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin), Barbara Hall (Paramount Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy

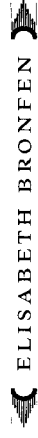
of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles), and Christiane Rhefus, who provided me with valuable sources.

1. Werner Sudendorf, director of the Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin, personal communication to author.
2. See my theory on stardom, in Garncarz, "Die Schauspielerin" 368–93, esp. 368–75.
3. Belach, Gandert, and Prinzier, eds., *Aufuhr der Gefühle* 95. For a contemporary confirmation that Bernhardt cast Dietrich, see *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung* 23.
4. See also "Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame," *Der Kinematograph* 3; Fritz Walter, qtd. in Gandert 218.
5. See also Sahl, qtd. in Gandert 218.
6. Garbo reached rank 13 in 1925 and a rank lower than 15 in 1926 (no ranks lower than 15 were given); one year later she vanished from the lists. *Love* reached rank 5 of Germany's top-grossing films in 1928–29, and *Mysterious Lady* rank 26 in 1929–30.
7. *Film-Kurier* 1929, *Film-Kurier* 1930, *Film-Kurier* 1931; *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame* reached rank 23 on the 1929 list.
8. *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, "Sex-Appeal" 566 (first quotation); Lustig, qtd. in Gandert 306 (second quotation); see also Aros, *Greta Garbo*, first page (n.p.).
9. See, for example, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, "Sex-Appeal" 566.
10. Belach, Gandert, and Prinzier, eds., *Aufuhr der Gefühle* 95. The quotation dates from 1977.
11. I have checked Finler; and Koszarski.
12. Qtd. in Shawell. 16. Unfortunately, we do not have a document from the Paramount Collection to prove that this was the case. The earliest extant document is a summary of Dietrich's early contracts with Paramount. From this document we definitely know that her first contract with Paramount was signed in Berlin, 20 February 1930, but we get no idea of how and why Dietrich had been given a contract.
13. C. Hooper Trask reviewed German films not only for *Variety* but also for the *New York Times*; see, for example, "German Film News." In addition, he played a role, Charles J. Merryman, in the German film *Ein blonder Traum* (1932, dir. Paul Martin).
14. *Dietrich, Marlene (Married name Sieber)—Actress*. A summary of Dietrich's early contracts with Paramount. Paramount Contract Files collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.
15. Sudendorf, *Marlene Dietrich* 61. Sudendorf gives the wrong date.

16. Werner Sudendorf, personal communication to author, 12 July 2001.

17. As far as we know from her diaries, she loved the top female German star, Henny Porten, a German ideal of womanhood, and not Greta Garbo (Sudendorf 24–25).

18. Dietrich was nearly four years older than Garbo; Garbo was born 18 September 1905, and Dietrich 27 December 1901. In her American passport Dietrich made herself younger, by giving her birth date as three years later, 27 December 1904.



Seductive

Departures of Marlene Dietrich

Exile and Stardom in *The Blue Angel*

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about the manner in which Marlene Dietrich, Hollywood's glamour star par excellence, appeared from the start to be nothing other than a creation of Josef von Sternberg, or, as Richard Dyer notes "a pure vehicle for the latter's fantasies and formalist concerns."¹ Yet one must not forget that von Sternberg was himself responsible for the idea that the icon of female seduction he had artificially constructed was fundamentally uncanny—a refiguration of his masculine self in a feminine body. Casting himself in the role of Svengali Joe, he enjoyed proclaiming, "In my films Marlene is not herself. Remember that, Marlene is not Marlene. I am Marlene, she knows that better than anyone."² At the same time, von Sternberg was also the first to admit that, although he was the creator of the starbody "Dietrich," he had not imposed a foreign personality upon her. He had merely known how to emphasize those attributes that he required for the cinematic persona he wanted her to embody, while his makeover of her appearance involved suppressing all the other aspects of his favorite actress that fit neither his fantasy of feminine seduction nor his formal concerns.³

The following deals with *The Blue Angel*, even though it was released only after Marlene Dietrich had already been introduced to an American audience with *Morocco*, because von Sternberg's only German film