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Berlin celebrates Marlene Dietrich

## Das Ende der Illusion

Der palästinensische Terror und die israelische Friedensbewegung



Palästinenser vor einem Plakat in Ramallah: „Besser einen schmerzhaften Frieden als einen qualvollen Krieg“.  
Photo: Getty Images

# Can Marlene Come Home to the New Berlin?

Unresolved Issues in Film Museum's Centenary Celebration

BY ADAM J. SACKS

AMarlene Dietrich star of all time, Marlene Dietrich has shaped the relation of Germans to fame itself. Yet the myth of Dietrich has remained ungraspable by popular German consciousness. This condition is determined by the burden of history and its fractures. She simply could not be appropriated or fixed into any role she didn't stay to build her career throughout the Weimar Republic, refused to be appropriated into the propaganda regiment of the Nazis, and then, once again, refused to return in the post-war era. The commercial and civic center of the "new Berlin," Potsdamer Platz, has crowned its centerpiece—where the red carpet is unrolled for the Berlinale Film Festival—Marlene-Dietrich-Platz. The future of Berlin as a center of film in the world is apparently to be found through the blessing of Dietrich. This attempt to latch on to

erotic friendships with men who willingly surrendered to her—the list includes Jean Gabin, Erich Marie Remarque, and Ernst Hemingway.

She also never retreated from expressing her conflicts or dislikes, as an infamous open letter to Elizabeth Taylor reveals. Her openness often led to rumors of ambiguous sexuality and transvestism, while consistently standing for the emancipation of women.

Marlene left for the United States in 1930, on the premiere night of *The Blue Angel*. She was brought to Hollywood by that film's director, Josef von Sternberg, who "discovered" her. Her principled anti-Nazi stance, which developed after 1933, expressed by her staying where she was a refugee or displaced person.

Marlene was the conscience of exile and a standing warning of what Germany had lost. Even though she was already living and working in California at the start of the Nazi era, Goebbels and Hitler wanted her "*heim ins Reich zu holen*" for their propaganda machine. Instead, she supported German emigrants in their efforts to flee Germany, and assisted them in becoming established in their new homes. In 1937, she became an American citizen, having had her German citizenship taken away. It was never to be offered to her again.

Marlene denounced Hitler's regime as barbarism out of a simple feeling of decency. The pictures of her in an American uniform on dedicated German soil are a commitment. Billy Wilder once remarked, "*...eine Mutter Teresa, aber mit schwarzen Beinchen*." For others, she could never be forgiven.

Accompanying De Gaulle into liberated Paris, she resolved not to return to live in Germany after the war. Upon a clandestine visit to Berlin in November 1945 for the burial of her mother, Marlene expressed her feelings "*Ich fühle, dass ich nicht nur meine Mutter zur Grabe getragen habe, sondern dass es das Deutschland, das ich liebe, nicht mehr gibt*." That her taking the side of the "enemy" was itself a form of love and loyalty to her homeland, represents an understanding ever elusive in Germany.

Although it remains a mystery just how German she continued to feel and what her expressed opinions about Jews were, she was indeed a child of bohemian Weimar Berlin, surrounded by the world the Nazis set out to destroy. Key figures in her career and life are among German Jewry's brightest stars: she attended Max Reinhardt's *Schauspielschule* in conjunction with his Deutsches Theater, she was Sternberg, and made famous by Josef von Sternberg, she achieved her greatest artistic success in Hollywood with von Sternberg's *Blue Angel* and Ernst Lubitsch's *Desire*, and in her post-war world tours and singing career, she drew on the talents of Burt Bacharach.

After the war, she starred in Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* set in the ruins of Berlin, and dramatizing in fiction what could have been, had Marlene stayed in Germany and become ensnared in Hitler's star system. She was also featured in



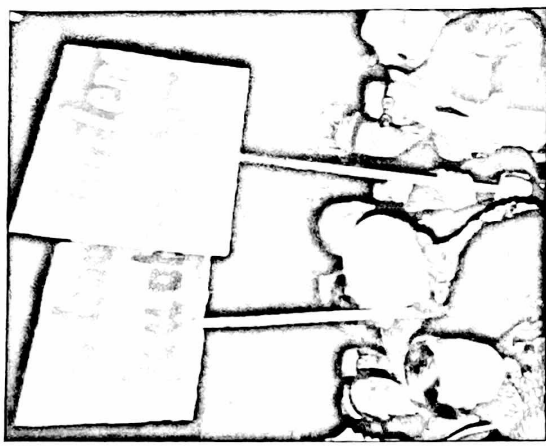
Al Hirschfeld's depiction of Dietrich, John Lund and Jean Arthur in *A Foreign Affair*, 1948.

the Weimar mythos, could not avoid the opening of old wounds. The old cry of "*Vaterlandsverraterei*" could be heard in protest.

The recently opened free-to-the-public exhibit on the first floor of Berlin's new Film Museum, running until February 2nd and entitled *Forever Young - Marlene Dietrich zum 100. Geburtstag*, is an attempt to bring Marlene home to the new Berlin. It is a birthday and homecoming party in one. The exhibition stages itself as a hypothetical birthday gala, where the invitees, Marlene's friends and lovers, are represented through photos and documents. Included along the walls is a gallery of photos, as well as a video montage of Marlene imitations and inspirations, such as Madonna in concert and Lizzy Minelli in *Cabaret*. There is an eclectic audio station of interpretations of the songs that made her famous: The Beatles in Hamburg playing "Falling in Love Again" and the cult writer William S. Burroughs who mumbles "*Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuß auf Liebe eingestellt*," the irony is that had Marlene lived to her 100th birthday, it probably would have been celebrated in Paris and not Berlin.

Her resiliency in resisting attempts at national appropriation is paralleled by her undefinable glamour. Her image, defined by a mixture of feminine and masculine attributes, suggests contradictions and mystery. What distinguishes her from a Garbo or Monroe, is that the power of attraction remains elusive.

Through her intensely personal letters, the exhibit reveals Dietrich's teasingly



Demonstrators declare Marlene Dietrich unwelcome in Germany in 1960.

*Judgment at Nuremberg*, one of the earliest films to address the Holocaust.

Marlene was the victim of negative press campaigns in Germany after the war, culminating in her visit of 1960 (which also extended behind the Iron Curtain to Warsaw and Moscow), where she was greeted by demonstrations and placards reading "*Marlene, hau ab*" and "*Bleib wo du bist*." In the East German boulevard press, the headlines read, "*Faschisten bedrohen Dietrich*." This visit demonstrated how difficult life could be made for emigrants, especially when they attempted to renew ties—thereafter she resolved not to return again. That resentments persist-

ed is demonstrated by the fact that upon her death there was no official homage for her in Berlin. Yet before she died, the born Berliner from Schöneberg expressed the wish to be buried in that city and expressed her happiness over the reunification. The homage appears 10 years later through this exhibition, yet without muddying the complex relationship of Marlene Dietrich and Germany. This public celebration of Dietrich is yet one more chapter in the country's attempt to co-opt her myth. This time it is in connection with the elusive trait that leads to the emanation of German public culture from the burdens of the past.

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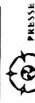
«der Strom von Bildern und Gedanken, der uns trägt»

Die Zeitschrift CASTRUM PERGRINI, die sich um Unternehmungen, Zensur für Literatur, Kunst, und Gesellschaft, bezieht, feiert ihr 50-jähriges Jubiläum. Seit 1961 erscheinen jährlich fünf sehr sorgfältig gestaltete Hefte, in diesem Jahr wird die 250. Nummer präsentiert.

Martin Butler bezieht den Herausgeber "wesentlich mehr als ein blosses literarisches Niveau". CASTRUM PERGRINI hat einen "auktorisierenden Charakter". Es ist eine Zeitschrift über Zeitzeugen und ihre Dokumente. Sie hält fest, was einzelne Situationen sich im Schwere in Mannschicht Drücke, Tagebücher und Gespräche – *la documenta humana*. CASTRUM PERGRINI – Pilgerburg war in den Jahren des Nationalsozialismus der Dachname eines Hauses an der Amsterdamer Herengracht. Dort lehren rassistisch und politisch verfehlte junge Menschen unter der Führung des deutschen Dichters und Verlegers Wolfgang Irmfried. Die Zeit des

Untergetauchtem überwald man mit gesauger Beschäftigung. Im Mittelpunkt stand das gemeinsame Lesen von Gedichten. Dasch, erschienen in seiner Zeit auch illegale Handgedruckte, in denen der gesungte, Widerstand, seinen Ausdruck fand.

1951 beschloss der Amsterdamer Freundschaftskreis, die deutschsprachige Zeitschrift CASTRUM PERGRINI herauszugeben, um in ihr Gesagte werden zu lassen, was man zuvor gelächelt hatte. Seither haben mehr als 100 Autoren in der Zeitschrift veröffentlicht, unter ihnen Karl Wolfschell, Peter Gans, Hanns Henry Jahn, Carl Zuckmayer. Es erschienen deutsche Enddrucke und Übertragungen etwa von Cesare Pavese, Konstantin Kavats, Marguerite Yourcenar. Über die Kultur des Abendlandes hinausgehend bringt die Zeitschrift seit Jahren auch persönliche Behandlung. Udo immer wieder teilt ein Mitarbeiter Stefan Georgi, dessen Verständnis einer geliebten Dichtung die Grundlage bildet. Von hier aus erschließen sich die breite Skala der Themen und das Zusammen von Kunst und Leben.



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