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### The Un/Homeliness of Postwar Cosmopolitanism

*The Case of West Germany*

Scholz, N.

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Natalie Scholz

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*The Case of West Germany*

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Stories about traveling and homecoming have a strong mythic potential as aesthetic forms that reflect on the human condition. Since, at least, the end of the eighteenth century some of those narratives have constructed cultural foundations for the big European nation building projects and others have accompanied colonial endeavors and their inherent violence. Often both kinds of narratives were interrelated.<sup>1</sup> In their mythmaking capacity such stories are related to the idea of a “home” in a double way. First, the home usually marks the place where the narrated journey begins and ends. Second, the story itself can become so familiar that it is perceived as an element of one’s cultural “home”. At the present moment many circulating stories that were once a familiar cultural “home” are reexamined critically for their mythical quality and their problematic ways of distorting the past. Meanwhile, artists use their creativity to rework and transform old myths in order to tell stories about travel and home from new angles thereby helping us to transcend some of the imaginative restrictions engrained in older stories. Thus *Ciro Guerra’s El abrazo de la serpiente* radically transforms European stories of adventure and discovery in South America and *Alfonso Cuarón’s Roma* does something similarly radical with bourgeois European notions of home and family.<sup>2</sup>

When big, culture defining stories come under intensified scrutiny, the work of a historian is affected deeply in many ways. In my own work as a cultural historian of western Europe, I have become particularly fascinated by the collective experience of the end of the Second World War as a deep political, material, moral and cultural crisis and by how, in reaction to this moment, a very successful story was created. This story constructed a postwar “West” that renewed itself in a nearly magical way and thereby reconfirmed itself as a beacon of modernity. In this narrative, the West German recovery and “economic miracle” occupies a special place as a model country of the West, in spite of the fact that the Federal Republic was the successor state of the Third Reich whose violent war campaigns in Europe had been responsible for the deep crisis in the first place. During the first fifteen years after the Second World War, a collective myth emerged about West German society and its place in history which had the power to make these kinds of contradictions disappear from view. At the center of this myth was a belief that the consumption and export of industrial commodities distanced *and* redeemed West Germany from the Nazi past and placed the country squarely within the present of an evolving postwar “West” that imagined itself as cosmopolitan.

The idea of cosmopolitanism that underpinned this new myth about West Germany also pervaded discourses in other West European countries and the US and was propagated by Marshall plan sponsored exhibitions. This version of cosmopolitanism built on the promise of a consumerism that would result from modernized industrial production based on Taylorist principles of productivity and from the free international trade of commodities within the Western hemisphere.<sup>3</sup> The main protagonists of this mythic story of postwar cosmopolitanism were not humans but the commodities themselves. These commodities were miraculously born out of the impersonal power of machines fed by human creativity and travelled around the world to connect people across national boundaries, creating a peaceful globalized “community” of modern consumers.<sup>4</sup> This kind of consumer cosmopolitanism was also linked

to a certain understanding of modern aesthetics, whose core aspects influenced western countries' modern architecture and interior design and shaped the widespread notion of a "modern home" filled with merchandise produced in the various countries of the West.<sup>5</sup>

The vision of capitalist modernity underlying this myth defined itself as both timeless *and* radically new. In this context postwar cosmopolitan aesthetics contributed to a perception of consumer modernity that effectively tore it out of concrete historical contexts. In her series *House Beautiful. Bringing the War Home* (1967-1972) US American artist Martha Rosler injected the reality of the ongoing Vietnam war into photographs of modern model interiors.<sup>6</sup> Applying the technique of photomontage, her work reassembled what mainstream consumer culture presented as polar opposites. If the modern home was coded as cosmopolitan in the 1950s and 60s, and if cosmopolitanism was understood as a project of peace, these images fundamentally disturbed such assumptions. In dominant discourses the modern home was supposed to be a place separated from the realities of war, an ideal place to which American GIs fighting in Vietnam were supposed to *come back to* after their heroic journey to defend the western way of life abroad. By placing images together that were usually seen as belonging to separate – cultural and geographical – spaces Rosler's *House Beautiful* series shattered this narrative and thereby made the homely unhomely and the familiar uncanny. In doing so the images replaced the fictional cosmopolitanism of the home as a modern consumer unit with the violent "cosmopolitanism" of warfare as this home's genuine historical context, usually hidden beneath its shiny surfaces.

There is an elective affinity between Rosler's work, its effects on the viewer and my own unexpected encounters in the archives of the postwar period where material repeatedly appeared in contexts in which it did not belong according to customary knowledge. The home of postwar consumer culture, which I had expected to conform to a certain framework of perception, turned out to be haunted by things appearing in the "wrong" place. I began

exploring how the texts and images of the period encapsulated disturbing historical connections and simultaneously made these same connections invisible. This effect worked primarily through the iconic, silent and seemingly ahistorical power of the material world of commodities, that is the very things that made the postwar West German “house beautiful.”<sup>7</sup>

### *An Unhomely Home*

In 1957, a feature film entitled *Franziska* was released in West German cinema’s that told the story of a love between a woman who finds her place in West Germany as a designer of modern costume jewelry and her husband Stefan who lives a rootless life, travelling the world as a newsreel reporter.<sup>8</sup> After having tastefully redecorated Stefan’s old house, Franziska develops her own career and sells her jewelry to “Munich”, “Chicago” and “Baltimore.” The happy ending comes about when Stefan, the husband, eventually becomes the photo editor of a famous West German lifestyle magazine. At a moment when the so called “economic miracle” was in full swing in West Germany, the movie *Franziska* gave the aesthetics of the home a crucial role in defining the two main characters and their challenges. In doing so, it echoed much of the ideas spread in lifestyle magazines and newspapers of the time. The chaotic mixture of global souvenirs and antiquated furniture in Stefan’s old house embodies his moral deficiency, while Franziska creates for both of them a – morally and aesthetically – proper place within postwar West Germany and the western world. When Stefan finally understands the value of this kind of home, the two solve their conflict and become successful citizens of West Germany’s globalizing consumer’s republic.<sup>9</sup>

*Franziska* fits in very well with the moment’s emphasis on interior design and internationalization. In 1952, the Marshall plan exhibition “We’re building a better life” had

successfully introduced the idea of a recognizably modern aesthetics of the home in Western Europe and the USA.<sup>10</sup> The idea was not only welcomed in West German highbrow publications but also in popular lifestyle magazines. In 1957, the international architecture exhibition *Interbau* in Berlin helped to shape the public image of West Germany as being part of a West defined by modern architecture and interior design, showcasing furniture from international designers.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, a major women's magazine invited readers to imagine themselves as the "cheerful, sociable and cosmopolitan" inhabitants of interiors furnished with objects from different western countries.<sup>12</sup> In the discourse of modern design internationalism its similar manifestation in different western countries reflected a basic cultural "commonality".<sup>13</sup> The *Franziska* movie's set design resembled the kind of cozy internationalized model interiors promoted in West German lifestyle magazines while Franziska's export of her costume jewelry accentuated global German trade relations.

*Franziska* thus reflects in many ways a familiar story about an evolving cosmopolitan character of postwar consumerism and aesthetic modernity in West Germany. In this story consumer modernity was a crucial mediator which enabled West Germany to open up to a future as a vital member of the western world, leaving behind the violent and nationalist past of the Third Reich. I came across the film early on in my research process, many years ago, and was excited about how perfectly it encapsulated so many aspects of the era's popular and political imaginary which I had discerned in other material. After a while, however, I discovered that the film was a remake of a Nazi film from 1941 entitled *Goodbye, Franziska!*<sup>14</sup> To a large extent the remake told the same story as the original with two exceptions: In the original Franziska ends up dropping her career as a designer, and, more importantly, the male character realizes the value of his family home in order to learn why he has to leave his home again and "defend" it as a soldier in the beginning Nazi war.

This ending gave *Goodbye, Franziska!* a distinct political meaning. The film premiered in April 1941, just two months before the German army attacked the Soviet Union and began what historians call the “war of extermination” in the East.<sup>15</sup> The main aim of this second phase of the war was to extend the German empire into Eastern Europe in a settler colonial way. Its racist agenda manifested itself in the extraordinarily brutal warfare against native inhabitants deemed “racially inferior” and in the systematic murder of the Jewish population and other excluded groups. Leading up to the start of this phase of the war, *Goodbye, Franziska!* was a major success with German audiences and arguably played a role in gaining Germans’ support.<sup>16</sup> It told a story of how female endurance and an ideal German home helped to canalize the male character’s rootless form of adventurousness into his willingness to serve the greater good of family and nation.

The discovery of this movie produced a conundrum when it comes to making sense of the remake. What did it mean that a postwar film which so perfectly represented cultural elements usually interpreted as defining West Germany *away* from its Nazi past turned out to be a remake of a film deeply enmeshed in Nazi culture?<sup>17</sup> Just like Rosler’s *House Beautiful* series, this new insight suddenly placed pieces of the past together which were usually perceived as separated and thereby made aspects of the past appear *unhomely* which were usually presented as *homely*. The discovery of the remake sent me on an unexpected journey to revisit some symbolic and narrative pillars of West German consumer modernity and explore their cultural relationship with histories of violence. From this exploration, postwar cosmopolitan modernity emerged as part of a story with a mythic character that was told and retold until it was perceived as a self-evident truth. This mythic story encapsulated traces of past, and present, relations of violence in a form that made these traces invisible. In doing so, however, it continued a framework that had enabled these relations of violence in the first place.

*At Home in the World 1957/1941*

*Goodbye, Franziska!* from 1941 conveys central aspects of the Nazi world view and connects the morality and aesthetics of the home to visions of an aggressively expanding German empire. The film also exposes the alienating dangers of immersing oneself in exotic cultures and foregrounds female endurance and sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> The 1957 *remake* substitutes the original's prospect of a bright future to be secured through military expansionism by highlighting the peaceful promise both of a moralized aesthetic consumerism and of West Germany's export boom. This new ending obviously deviated sharply from the Nazi project of violently conquering new colonial *living space* in the East which informed *Goodbye, Franziska!*

Reading 1957 *Franziska* in the light of 1941 *Goodbye, Franziska!* nevertheless throws a different light on the postwar promotion of modern home aesthetics and the West German consumers' imagined relation to the world at large. In 1941, the Nazi version of colonial conquest in its close relation to the good German home was presented as the necessary alternative to the male character's life of adventures which alienated him from his home, his nation and *volk*. In 1957, this outcome was replaced by the consumerist dream of a well-organized and aesthetically harmonious world imbedded in a transnational network of commodity circulation. This consumerist dream, however, was still related to the world at large in a manner that contained many echoes of the original movie. The 1957 *Franziska* movie conveyed its postwar message by revisiting, reproducing and adapting much of the original story and its implicit political meanings. The film represented the world outside the West as having an alluring, disorienting and pernicious exotic character which was to be controlled, domesticated and integrated into a home designed along the lines of moralized aesthetic principles.

At the center of both cinematic narratives there is the idea of a right and a wrong way to be at home in the world. Franziska embodies the *right* way with her sense of duty, whereas the



male character, called Stefan in 1957 and Michael in 1941, embodies the *wrong* way with his unstable and rootless life. On his adventurous journeys, the male character risks being sucked into and losing himself in exotic worlds. Through these themes and their visual and aural staging, the films reinforce negative and positive stereotypes by contrasting foreign and domestic scenes. At one crucial moment in both versions of the film, the male character receives a letter informing him about the birth of his son in Germany, while he is partying in a bar in some exotic setting, surrounded by lascivious women and jazz music. With its exposition of alcoholic and sexual excess, the scene shows the dangers of an unbridled life in a chaotic, culturally and racially mixed environment in contrast to the well-ordered German home, inhabited by Franziska and their son, to which the male character promptly returns with the resolution of marrying her and entering into respectable life.

Crucially, however, the film systematically identifies this contrast of characters and being-in-the-world with the two main characters' equally contrasting relationship to domestic material culture. The danger of the male character's estrangement from his cultural roots is captured in his old inherited house which is characterized above all by the chaotic, overstuffed and eclectic mixture of old furniture and exotic souvenirs from around the world. When Stefan/Michael shows Franziska around in his home, he explains that he randomly picks them up somewhere and quickly loses interest in them. Franziska morally dismisses his relation to these objects while recognizing the aesthetic value of some exotic pieces. This opposition between both characters is even more fully established when they meet for the second time in Berlin, where Franziska meanwhile has started an independent life as a designer. Both films construct a sharp opposition between the eclectic interior of Michael's/Stefan's inherited house and Franziska's modern Berlin apartment, which she describes as embodying her character.

In the 1941 movie, Michael's old house reappears redecorated by Franziska with white walls, less cluttered and more spacious. Instead of exotic objects we see old armchairs newly

upholstered with fashionable paisley patterns. Even though this is not a modern interior in the strict sense, it certainly evokes Werkbund principles with its clear spatial arrangement and stylistic order. The selective incorporation of two exotic objects gives them an appropriately subordinate place within the proper aesthetic of a German home.

Considering that Germans encountered the fascist politicization of German “living culture” (*Wohnkultur*) along the lines of Werkbund principles of modern aesthetics in countless media of the time, the movie’s skillful use of the silent world of objects strengthened its ideological message.<sup>19</sup> The set design and its place in the narrative closely links Michael’s conversion to the value of family life with dominant ideas about the meaning of home aesthetics as they were disseminated during the Third Reich. When Franziska redecorates what used to be Michael’s eclectically furnished home she integrates it into a new national whole in the making. As Michael is called to serve the cause of a Greater Germany she explains to him that his desire “to conquer worlds at any cost” merely makes sense in its connection to the “home” – which effectively meant the Germanized home of the National Socialist project.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1957 film, the interior of Stefan’s redecorated home is equally placed in contrast to the exotic world in which the boundaries between Europe and non-Europe, white and non-white dissolve. The cheerful yellow accents of the family home’s interior are reminiscent of the bright colors that were emphatically promoted in the magazines of the time as part of the internationalized modern home, which updated Werkbund principles for the postwar era. The white walls can be seen in this context like a metaphor for Stefan’s turn to the sedentary “white” life which safely contains the remaining “black” elements in the form of African masks on its walls.

At the end of the 1941 movie, maps show the movement of the army before Michael is leaving for the war. At the end of the 1957 movie, we see Stefan in his role as a photo editor, standing in front of a world map inside the modern interior of the magazine’s office, giving

advice to his correspondents for their trip to Asia. The last scenes show the reconciled couple inside a newly rented bright and modern, yet still empty apartment. Reviewers of the 1957 film regularly compared it to the original, whose entanglement with Nazi propaganda was referred to in a self-evident manner.<sup>21</sup> The new ending was appreciated as a morally improved or “redeeming” turn of the plot, yet also criticized as implausible. For many reviewers, the memory of 1941’s *Goodbye, Franziska!* was obviously connected strongly to a past feeling of being “at home.”

The home’s aesthetic and its relationship to foreign worlds is a crucial aspect of how these two films attempt to produce an emotional truth. After the war, a new perception of the cultural relationship between the home and the world was constructed on the basis of “affective economies” whose histories were both present and concealed.<sup>22</sup> West Germany’s modern home was supposedly redeemed from its past by an aesthetic cosmopolitanism which had itself emerged from the cultural context of a not yet postcolonial West.

### *The Cosmopolitan Modern and its Others*

If we use the term “cosmopolitan” to describe the internationalization of the modern home in West Germany it should not be understood as unambiguously inclusive. Studying the meanings of this internationalization from a critical angle requires acknowledging cosmopolitanism’s longer intellectual history as a project of peace that was conceived, in Walter Dignolo’s words, “from one particular location: that of Europe, of the most civilized nations.”<sup>23</sup> In order to avoid reproducing this pattern, it is necessary to apply “border thinking” and look at the discourse of postwar internationalism by focusing on the realities – people, objects and aesthetic appearances – that are positioned at, or outside, its borders.

The discourse on modern design in Germany connected to the German Werkbund, which was founded in 1905, continuously promoted the idea of shaping national culture as “an organic and aesthetic whole” by transforming public and private spaces according to the new ideas about good forms.<sup>24</sup> For the Werkbund, the inherent superiority and purity of the good German form was also meant to help conquer world markets and legitimate global dominance. This influential discourse is better known for its attempts to develop a socially inclusive aesthetic and discard the remnants of feudal hierarchies in the guise of decorative historicist styles. At the same time, however, one of its central characteristics was how it combined beliefs in national and also racial superiority, common in all of Europe, with a fundamental moral dichotomy between good and bad form.<sup>25</sup>

The underlying assumptions about aesthetics and the nation went on to deeply shape Nazi policies and propaganda during the Third Reich. In this radicalized context the always excluded “other,” the ugly flip-side of the good form, turned into an “other” that was in line with the Third Reich’s racialized culture. These ideas were also related to the broader context of European colonialism. To give one example: The magazine *Innen-Dekoration*, which was close to the Werkbund, published an article in 1938 which defined “style” as a necessary outcome of both the race’s and the nation’s “human forms”:

“European officials, even missionaries, who serve in the colonies, have to come back to Europe from time to time [...] in order to find back to the European human form which they gradually lose in the countries of dark-skinned people.”<sup>26</sup>

The racial “other” represents the absence of a civilized “life expression” and evokes an existential danger of alienation that Europeans, and Germans, face if they mingle too intensely with non-European cultures.<sup>27</sup>

In 1952, the Marshall plan exhibition “We’re building a better life” had successfully introduced the idea of a recognizably modern aesthetics of the home in Western Europe and the USA.<sup>28</sup> We have to be interested in the “borders” of postwar cosmopolitanism to notice that, although black GIs had become part of West German everyday life, black Americans were absent from all images promoting the American home abroad and the lifestyle it represented. That being western implied being white was accepted as self-evident and thereby also informed the postwar conceptions of the modern home.<sup>29</sup> While the explicit evocation of race disappeared from the postwar West German discourse on the modern home, the dichotomy between the moralized good form and dubious deviations from it remained paramount. This contrast, I argue, implicitly continued to build on a colonial division of the world. As the development of this postwar discourse was intertwined with the emerging concept of the West, its internationalism necessarily reflected the European and white exclusivity of this “West.”

The West German magazine *magnum* was founded in 1953 to provide a Western internationalist forum on the modern character of the present, paying special attention to the aesthetic form of everyday objects. The editorial of the first number reformulated a totalizing vision of society as an organic whole and embraced modern design as the expression of “a new historic type of human” calling anybody a “misfit” who “evades this development.”<sup>30</sup> The images presented modern design and architecture from the USA, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Italy and occasionally France and England. The captions informed the readers about the objects’ designers and their national origin, the juxtaposition of images informed them about the fact that they were looking at an aesthetically homogenous appearance of the West.<sup>31</sup>

For the 1957 *Interbau* exhibition, architects from different countries built model social housing units to construct a new Hansa neighborhood in West Berlin. A large majority of the architects and interior designers came from the northern parts of Europe (especially Germany

and Scandinavia), a small number was French and Italian. Brazil was represented by Oscar Niemeyer and the USA by Walter Gropius.<sup>32</sup> The Werkbund published a book which documented the interior designs of the *Interbau* buildings. The text hailed the project for its “global harmony” and the international designers for establishing an organic relationship between the domestic space and “the human being of today.”<sup>33</sup> The stylistic homogeneity of the model interiors appeared like the dreamscape of an ideal social world. What did *not* harmonize with these designed spaces, however, was seen as a moral catastrophe in danger of falling outside the social itself. Both in the first *magnum* issue and in the Werkbund’s *Interbau* publication, the proclaimed international character of modern design and architecture was used to reformulate on a supra-national level older assumptions about the relationship between the aesthetics of everyday objects and the undisturbed social “harmony” and homogeneity previously ascribed to the German nation. The internationalism of this fantasy had its own structure with German, Scandinavian and some Swiss designers dominating the scene.

Exclusion on the basis of cultural and racial hierarchies was built into this discourse in a subtle manner. An illustrated volume on international modern architecture and interior design, published in West Germany in 1955, presented houses that were built by architects from all over the world and stood in Germany, Italy, Holland, the US, Japan, Switzerland and South Africa. According to the author, the South-African house could just as well be found in Germany, because “the ideas about modern dwelling and living are obviously shared by the progressive people in the whole world” adding that “this thought produces much hope and somehow, in the subconscious, the believe in a true-to-life organic development of our human community.”<sup>34</sup> South Africa, at the time, had already received international criticism for having installed a system of racial segregation called apartheid in 1948.<sup>35</sup> Including the country in this way in 1955 meant that the international “community” at the basis of the book’s vision of a globalized modern home was supposed to be white.

*The Modern Home's Exotic Fantasies*

Inviting readers to furnish their homes with design objects from various countries was certainly an innovation with respect to the Nazi past. This new cosmopolitan trend, however, did not include non-European or non-Western countries in the same way. Orientalist exoticism and patterns of thought played a significant role in postwar popular culture and also entered the West German discourse on modern design.<sup>36</sup> The oriental rug, with its centuries long presence in European culture held a special place, representing both Oriental difference and western expert knowledge about eastern traditions. In this capacity, oriental rugs had also regularly been integrated into modern interiors from the 1920s onwards. From the mid 1950s the oriental carpet was present again in West Germany as a *German* quality product which expertly appropriated a foreign influence and was compatible with modern interiors.<sup>37</sup>

Even though the “African” and the “Oriental” activated different sets of associations, both were identified with inferior cultures and a lack of civilization in a way that made it possible to position postwar consumer ideals against and above them. An ad that contained both versions of exoticism was published in March 1958 by Besmer carpets.<sup>38</sup> It shows five adults standing and sitting on and around a modern sofa and wooden table at the rear end of a large oriental rug. At the center of the scene the man of the house smiles and points with his index finger toward an African mask which is being held by the woman next to him. In his other hand, the man holds a printed brochure. A second African mask lies on the table. What makes this advertising special is the combination of an oriental rug with modern interior items *and* African objects. Through the physical relationship between the people and these objects, the scene radiates a sense of cultural mastery and ownership. The man points to the mask with a gesture that speaks both of his expert knowledge and of his owner's pride. Whereas the carpet, called a “masterpiece,” represents the Europeanized appropriation of a foreign cultural influence into

the idealized sphere of the modern home, the mask is staged as an exotic foreign object that is subjugated to a superior regime of knowledge and power.

Published only a year after *Franziska* had hit West German cinema screens the ad shows similarities with the use of African masks in this film. In the redecorated home in Passau the African masks occupy a special place. They hover in the scene when Franziska's father morally lectures Stefan before accepting him as his son-in-law and are visible when Franziska accuses Stefan during a pivotal argument of treating her like one of his "pleasing curiosities".<sup>39</sup> One can therefore read the presence of the African masks not only as a sign of Franziska's aesthetic expertise but also as a reminder of the looming danger that Stefan might relapse into a world of cultural and racial ambiguity estranging him from his home. The movie's release coincided with an increased attention for antiques and non-European art objects in the lifestyle magazines. The magazine *Constanze* reported on the booming antique business and invited readers to "play explorer," unravel the objects' "secrets" and establish an "inner relation" with them. The article presented a whole wall filled with non-European masks whose original function it explained as "fending off demons."<sup>40</sup> African masks and other "primitive" artworks were nevertheless a rare sight in postwar representations of modern interiors.<sup>41</sup>

Daniel Sherman has identified a specific kind of "cosmopolitan fantasy" in early 1960s French magazines that conjoined the modern interior design and primitive art objects thereby sidestepping older ideas about aesthetic hierarchies. Against the background of the Algerian war this new "association style" offered "the French a means of reasserting global status on the basis of transnational cultural prowess rather than imperial domination."<sup>42</sup> While French design magazines still featured "colonial" interiors until 1960, primitive artworks and the "Oriental" surfaced on the West German design pages of the late 1950s as exotic in the sense of "the space of an Other, outside or beyond the confines of a "civilization,"" and thus invited German readers to assume a superior knowledge position as Western consumer.<sup>43</sup>



Even without an overseas colonial empire in violent dissolution, the ongoing decolonization in Africa left its own marks on the West German discourse. In 1956, the magazine *Constanze* announced: “The “savages” don’t live so uncomfortable after all” and presented exhibits from an ethnic museum in four photographs with a smiling young woman attempting to sit on or eat from “household utensils” from Cameroon, the Congo and the Amazonas that were all characterized as

“amazingly simple, functional and even beautifully crafted. They fit in exactly with their environment and with the people who use them. Something that cannot be said about some of the modern furniture in our homes.”<sup>44</sup>

To include, in this ironic manner, African artworks into the area of modern living with its typical emphasis on the “simple” and “functional” effectively underlined their position outside of any serious civilization. The awkward ambiguity of the piece, however, indicated that *something* had begun to shift and that journalists began to struggle with modifying the deeply engrained assumptions of racial hierarchies. Eight months later, the same magazine declared self-reflexively that the recent independence of African states needed to change “our image of the negroes” who had started to “study Astrophysics” while “in our thoughts we still decorate these people with glass pearls and colorful cotton flags.”<sup>45</sup>

In the 1957 film *Franziska*, the title character emerges as a topical heroine for the West German economic miracle because she sells her jewelry to consumers in the larger transatlantic world. This success echoed the regained prestige of the Federal Republic in a Western hemisphere that defined itself as cosmopolitan through international trade relations and a consumerism shaped by a modern design which had come to define the aesthetic of “the West”. When this postwar moral geography gained cultural leverage, however, it still rested on the

foundational assumption of a white and European superiority, in spite of the fact that this foundation simultaneously began to decompose. In one scene Franziska is working on her jewelry while her son is playing on the floor at her side. When she asks her son “Bertie, what are you making there?” he answers “nose rings for the negroes.”<sup>46</sup> The magazine *Brigitte* had reported already in 1954 on the influence of African tribal regalia on modern European costume jewelry.<sup>47</sup> While such an influence is stylistically discernible in the pieces of jewelry displayed in *Franziska*, the scene in turn illustrates how an imagined primitive Africa serves as a negative reference point for Franziska’s positive contribution to the export oriented West Germany.<sup>48</sup>

### *Thinking with the Unhomely*

According to Homi Bhabha “The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world.”<sup>49</sup> In the postcolonial novels that Bhabha discusses the “unhomely” brings an unspeakable and painful past to presence that appears in the very sphere, the home, which is supposed to be shielded from it. Bhabha’s “unhomely” is a literal translation of Freud’s “unheimlich” (uncanny) which the latter had defined as “what was once *heimisch*, home-like, familiar,” adding that “the pre-fix ‘un’ is the token of repression.”<sup>50</sup> The dynamic of homely versus unhomely (*heimisch* vs *unheimlich*), in Freud’s formulation, depends on an experience that changes through time. The unhomely appears when the repressed pushes through the surface of the conscious in what *used to* be homely and familiar. The repressed was always there, yet its status has now changed. It used to be contained inside the home in a way that secured the latter’s character as “homely” in the sense of familiar, safe and comfortable.

When the unhomely can be experienced, this containment must therefore already have developed some cracks.

The 1957 *Franziska* movie constructed a world firmly positioned in the present and geared towards West Germany's bright future as a model country of the West. It showed the genesis of a home to which the male character comes back by transforming his adventurous life of travelling to alienating exotic worlds into one that fitted in the new consumer cosmopolitanism. Discovering the original Nazi film *Goodbye, Franziska!*, however, suddenly exposed postwar *Franziska* as being saturated by "unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present."<sup>51</sup> The close bond connecting the two movies across the historical rupture of 1945 was unproblematic and self-evident for the contemporary viewers, but it confronted me with a reality that I have experienced as unhomely for two reasons: first, postwar cosmopolitanism still works as a cultural "home"; second, the repressed it contains has already cracked its surface.

The aftermath of the Second World War was *not* a postcolonial moment, yet it generated myths, including stories about travelling and homecoming, that, consciously or unconsciously, still shape much of our thinking. The attraction of modern cosmopolitanism as a political imaginary in West Germany consisted to a considerable extent in its capacity to obscure its own history and to convey visual and narrative worlds that felt homely because they both contained *and* concealed the imprints of a violent past and present within themselves. The power of this myth relied on the historic intertwinement of a – still superficial – post-fascist consensus in West Germany with a – weakened yet ongoing – colonial paradigm that included white superiority and dominated most of the "West." Because the legacy of colonialism in all its forms is recognized today as one of the major cultural challenges standing in the way of a more humane and less destructive future, the repressed can appear in the form of an unhomely feeling that urges us to face up to the strangeness of our own home and ask, with Toni Morrison, "why does its lock fit my key?"<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies. Conquest, Family and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* (Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> *El abrazo de la serpiente*, Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, 2015, directed by Ciro Guerra; *Roma*, Mexico 2018, directed by Alfonso Cuarón.

<sup>3</sup> Sheryl Kroen, “Robinson Charley: The Ideological Underpinnings of Atlantic History,” in: Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweed eds., *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2014), 66–89, 295–299; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front. The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); David W. Ellwood, “The Propaganda of the Marshall Plan in Italy in a Cold War Context,” *Intelligence and National Security* 18, 2 (2003): 225–36.

<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the Volkswagen Beetle as a conspicuous example of this postwar myth in Natalie Scholz, “Ghosts and Miracles. The Volkswagen as Imperial Debris in Postwar West Germany”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62:3 (2020), 487-519.

<sup>5</sup> Greg Barnhisel, ‘Perspectives USA and the cultural Cold War. Modernism in Services of the State’, *Modernism / Modernity* 14 (2007) 729-754; David Crowley and Jane Pavitt eds., *Cold War Modern Design 1945-1970* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008); Gay McDonald, ‘The Modern American Home as Soft Power: Finland, MoMA and the ‘American Home 1953’, *Journal of Design History* 23:3 (2010), 387-408.

<sup>6</sup> See a selection of photographs from the series on: <https://www.martharosler.net/house-beautiful-bringing-the-war-home-1967-1972>. In depth analysis of the series is provided by August Jordan Davis, *Bringing the War Back Home. The Anti-War Photomontages of Martha Roser (1967-2008)* (Ph.D. University of Liverpool, 20011).

<sup>7</sup> My approach is influenced by Roland Barthes’s concept of myth. Whereas Barthes exposed the ideological work of myth within a Marxist framework that presupposed a mostly unchanging bourgeois social structure, I primarily focus on how postwar myths worked with (and created a certain perception of) historical-temporal ruptures by tracing their genealogy back in time across these ruptures. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and translated by Annette Levers (London: Vintage Books, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Later, the film was also circulated under the title „Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska!“, FRG 1957, CCC Filmkunst production, directed by Wolfgang Liebeneiner.

<sup>9</sup> I am borrowing the term “consumer’s republic” from Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic. The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Greg Castillo, “Domesticating the Cold War. Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:2 (2005), 261-288.

<sup>11</sup> „Architektur. Interbau. Heiliger Otto“, *Der Spiegel*, n. 48, 31 July 1957, 48-53; Sabina Lietzmann, „Wohnen im fließenden Raum. Impressionen von der Interbau in Berlin“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 25 July 1957, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> „Das Brigitte-Zimmer“, *Brigitte*, n. 13, Juni 1957, 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> Deutscher Werkbund Berlin ed., *Wohnen in unserer Zeit. Wohnungsgestaltung der Interbau*, published on the occasion of the Interbau Berlin 57 (Darmstadt: Verlag Das Beispiel, 1957), 2-3.

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<sup>14</sup> „Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska.“ Germany 1941, Terra-Filmkunst GmbH, directed by Helmut Käutner.

<sup>15</sup> See Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann ed., *War of Extermination. The German Military in World War II* (New York: Berghahn, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> According to the *Deutsche Tagespost* from 1957 the first Franziska-Film was „the success of the year 1941“, see ‘Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska. Ruth Leuwerik auf Marianne Hoppes Spuren Ihr Partner Carlos Thompson’, *Deutsche Tagespost*, 14 June 1957.

<sup>17</sup> “Goodbye, Franziska!” still played in the Third Reich’s cinemas as late as 1944, see the Austrian database ANNO <http://anno.onb.ac.at/> (22 January 2019).

<sup>18</sup> On the ideological and propagandistic character of the film in general see Franzis Courtade and Pierre Cadars, *Geschichte des Films im Dritten Reich* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1975), 213-214; Robert C. Reimer, “Turning inward: An Analysis of Helmut Käutner’s *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska*; *Romanze in Moll*, and *Unter den Brücken*“, in: Robert C. Reimer ed., *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens. Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2000), 214-239.

<sup>19</sup> On modern design and the Werkbund during National Socialism see Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects. A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 23-73; Joan Campbell, *The German Werkbund. The Politics of Reform and the Applied Arts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1978) 243-288; Sabine Weibler ed., *Design in Deutschland 1933-45. Ästhetik und Organisation des Deutschen Werkbundes im ‚Dritten Reich‘* (Gießen: Anabas-Verlag, 1990); Winfried Nerdinger ed., *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus. Zwischen Anbiederung und Verfolgung* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1993); Stefanie Schäfers, *Vom Werkbund zum Vierjahresplan. Die Ausstellung ‘Schaffendes Volk’, Düsseldorf 1937* (Düsseldorf: Droste-Verlag, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Quote by Emi Ehm, „Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska.“, *Völkischer Beobachter*, Vienna edition, 17 May 1941, 4.

<sup>21</sup> All the reviews are archived in the file „Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska!“ Presseecho, Artur Brauner-Archiv im Deutschen Filminstitut – DIF e.V.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Ahmed, “Affective economies”, *Social Text* 22:2 (2004), 117-139.

<sup>23</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, „The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism“, *Public Culture* 12:3 (2000), 721-748, 735.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Jenkins, “The Citizen at Home. *Wohnkultur* before World War I”, in: Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski eds., *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Stanford/CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 95-107, quote 104.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Hardtwig, „Kunst, liberaler Nationalismus und Weltpolitik. Der deutsche Werkbund 1907-1914“, in: Hardtwig, *Nationalismus und Bürgerkultur in Deutschland 1500-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 246-273; John Maciuka, *Before the Bauhaus. Architecture, Politics and the German State, 1890-1920* (Cambridge UP, 2005); Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 353-356. For an analysis emphasizing the dichotomy between good and bad forms Mark Jarzombek, „The „Kunstgewerbe“, the „Werkbund“, and the Aesthetics of Culture in the Wilhelmine Period“, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (1994) 53:1, 7-19.

<sup>26</sup> Wilhelm Michel, „Vom „Stil“ und was damit zusammenhängt“, *Innen-Dekoration*, n. 12, 1938, 404.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> The Werkbund magazine *Baukunst und Werkform* published a printed version of this visual exhibition strategy alongside Alfons Leitl's article on the Marshall plan exhibit, see Alfons Leitl, 'Die Wohnkultur der westlichen Völker', *Baukunst und Werkform*, n. 12, December 1952, 39-50.

<sup>29</sup> Architectural historian Dianne Harris has recently shown how the both the imaginary and the practice of modern homes in the growing US American suburbs continued structural racial segregation in new forms. Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses. How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). On racial segregation as part of the postwar move to the suburbs in the US see also Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 194-256.

<sup>30</sup> 'Wieso modern', *magnum*, n. 1, 1953, 25-26.

<sup>31</sup> A Germanic emphasis found its way into the captions, too, by presenting Richard Neutra, an American citizen of Jewish Austrian descent, as "the Austrian architect in the USA", *magnum*, n. 1, 1953.

<sup>32</sup> See Deutscher Werkbund Berlin ed., *Wohnen in unserer Zeit*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2-3, 6-9.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Koch, *Praktisch Bauen + schön Wohnen = glücklich Leben* (Stuttgart: Alexander Koch, 1955), 46.

<sup>35</sup> Saul Dubow, „Smuts, the United Nations and the Rhetoric of Race and Rights“, *Journal of Contemporary History* 43:1 (2008), 45-74, especially 47-48; see also „Malan nationalists want total segregation“, *Life* magazine, 18 September 1950, 114.

<sup>36</sup> Sunka Simon, "Der vord're Orient. Colonialist Imagery in Popular Postwar German *Schlager*", *The Journal of Popular Culture* 34:3 (2000), 87-108.

<sup>37</sup> Kurt Erdmann, *Europa und der Orientteppich* (Berlin and Mainz: Florian Kupferberg, 1962); „Ein Brigitte-Zimmer für ihn: Hier arbeitet der Hausherr“, *Brigitte*, n. 19, 9.9.1958, 66-67.

<sup>38</sup> "Der Besmer-“Micado” ist ein Meisterstück", Besmer carpet advertisement, *Constanze*, n. 6, 19 March 1958, 67.

<sup>39</sup> The second scene is available on youtube:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_1POm3V9Bw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_1POm3V9Bw) (10 August 2021).

<sup>40</sup> „Keine Angst vor Antiquitäten!“ *Constanze*, n. 12, 30 May 1956, 28-20. The *Constanze* issue in which the Besmer advertising first appeared also featured an article under the title "Art does not have to be expensive" on affordable plaster casts of ancient Egyptian, Assyrian and Buddhist sculptures. „Kunst muss nicht teuer sein“, *Constanze*, n. 6, 19 March 1958.

<sup>41</sup> In the *Innen-Dekoration* of the Nazi years exotic objects were equally scarce. Occasionally small non-European artifact appeared in model interiors, but no discourse accompanied such examples: An Asian mask appears in the background of an interior designed by a Sudeten German architect, *Innen-Dekoration*, n. 12, 1938, 402; an African mask appears on the wall of an „apartment of a friend of the arts“, *Innen-Dekoration*, n. 10, 1941, 287.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel J. Sherman, "Post-Colonial Shic: Fantasies of the French Interior, 1957-62", *Art History* 27 (2004) 5, 770-805, and Daniel J. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), here 83.

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<sup>43</sup> Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories. Literature, Colonialism, and the Fien de Siècle* (Stanford University Press 1991), 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> „Die „Wilden“ wohnen gar nicht so unbequem: Sitzen Sie doch mal afrikanisch!“, *Constanze*, n. 6, 7 March 1956, 115.

<sup>45</sup> „Unser Weltbild hängt schief! Constanze fotografierte junge Ausländerinnen: Wir kommen direkt aus Afrika“, *Constanze*, n. 24, 14.11. 1956, 36-39.

<sup>46</sup> This scene was also noticed by Annette Brauerhoch, „*Fräuleins*“ und *GIs. Geschichte und Filmgeschichte* (Frankfurt/M and Basel: Stroemfeld/Nexus, 2005), 227.

<sup>47</sup> „Aus Afrika nach Europa“, *Brigitte*, n. 25, 1 December 1954, 33.

<sup>48</sup> See also the ad „Wie die Neger!“, SABA Radio advertisement, *Constanze*, n. 7, March 1950, 43.

<sup>49</sup> Homi Bhabha, „The World and the Home“, *Social Text* (1992), 31/32, 141-153, here 141.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Bhabha, „The World and the Home,“ 146-47.

<sup>51</sup> Bhabha, „The World and the Home,“ 147.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Bhabha, „The World and the Home,“ 141.