

Just 'Germany'

MICHAEL:

Does the word 'Hinterland' mean anything for you?

FRANK:

It's a word that we use, but it's not used very often, because along with the censorship in the United States you find a simplification of the language ... you use smaller and smaller words, less colorful words. You use the same short words over and over again. It's a symptom of a post-literate society.

MICHAEL:

So the idea of 'Hinterland-Development' which is very important and vital to a city like Braunschweig - that's comparable to the cultural situation in America ... cultural lack ...?

FRANK:

Cultural lack, you found some?

MICHAEL:

We're talking about everyday culture like going out to eat and so on ... we have been watching people and their life is so simple in a way...

FRANK:

... simple-minded ...

MICHAEL:

PRESENTING A PIECE OF THE BERLIN WALL AS A GIFT TO FRANK.

Here's a good example of the German 'Hinterland'...

FRANK:

... it's very, very nice, and I'm glad to see that you can carry it around with you - can I keep it? A piece of wall! ... So they are selling it over there?

MICHAEL:

This is a piece of our brain. That's the idea of what's happening about our place. We did not have any 'Hinterland' at all until the 9th of November. This magazine was founded before the wall came down. And then the development hit us. Braunschweig now is in the middle of Germany. And now we get the feeling of what it is like to live in a "proper" city.

FRANK:

The other thing which is interesting is now you can say just 'Germany'. You don't have to say 'West- or East-Germany. It's just amazing!

MICHAEL:

But isn't that scary to some people? They fear that Germany is getting so much power again.

FRANK:

Not to me! I think you have as much power as they're entitled to. If you have a well-functioning society, then you should take your society to whatever extremes you can take it to. It should grow and be as good as it should be. And if you make mistakes then you should have the equal results for the bad decisions, but I take great acceptance to the stuff that it's been printed in the British papers about Germany.

The Ugly German?

FRANK:

There's a mentality there and also to a certain extent in the United States that is tied to World War II which is: "the people will never grow out of it". That's it. It's all they know and I don't know how long you've been studying US media, but you can still see not only in normal broadcast channels but on our cultural channel, which is called ANI, the Arts and Entertainment Channel, they show so much documentary footage of World War II. It's just on and on and on - it's an endless source of revenue for them, because the films are public domain. The 'Time Life' commercial-you know - 'Mystic', 'Drug addicts', have you seen this?

That's an industry onto itself in the United States and also there's all the Hollywood war movies and if you grow up seeing nothing but that, you hear the word 'Unified Germany', you are going to be scared! It's the



instant psychological result.

But I also know that there is a public relations campaign that the German government is going to launch to try and change some of their attitudes. I think it's necessary and has to be done and the sooner that they start it - the better.

The first people who would have to be approached with that are the trading partners in the EEC, in especially in England, because it's gonna be very hard to reeducate those people - another post-literate society ...

MICHAEL:

So many people just don't realize that we belong to the postwar generation and we did not 'do it'. So whenever I travelled to the United States or to Canada, people are just overwhelmed by this image of Germany and all they hear or see on TV is those brutal stupid German soldiers. And if you come here and they ask you questions like "Is Adolf Hitler still alive?" Or "Are you from East- or West-Germany" - that's years ago, because they didn't realize that it was impossible to leave East Germany at all...

FRANK:

... unless you are an athlete in the Olympics.

MICHAEL:

Many Germans are quite willing to take responsibility of what happened through our parents and grandparents. For instance, as a German visitor in England you're confronted with a huge output of comic books dealing with the Third Reich and World War II and even well-educated people there wouldn't be aware of the worldwide phenomenon "fascism in everyday life".

FRANK:

Oh, every society is just a product of manipulation that is done to them by the government with the assistance of the educational system and with the assistance of any privately owned media - it's a package deal! And I'm sure every nation has their own version of it. It's just the situation now in the United States, England, maybe in France to a certain extent, the supposed fear about the unified Germany, it's inevitable, because what's been done to the brains of the people who live in those countries. They had no other information.

Zappa In Deutschland

FRANK:

For example, the first time I went to Germany I was scared to go there. We went there in 1967 to play in Essen. The only thing I knew about Germany was submarine movies, all that kind of stuff and it was all 'Achtung - Achtung - Achtung!!'. And we got off the plane in Düsseldorf and there're men with machine guns in the airport. We didn't have machine guns in US airports - soldiers walking all with machine guns!! - everybody in the band goes: "What the fuck is going on here?"

What happened to me the first time that I went there? Remember, we played in Essen and I just read this book "The Arms of Krupp" with all the horrors of what went on, and then looking at this town and thinking of all the stuff I read in this book. I must say that I was a totally prejudiced individual when I got there.

But at least I'm intelligent enough to open my mind and talk with the people who live there and I can easily admit that my first impressions and second impressions, too, because when we went to Berlin and played and we had the riot in 1968, I never wanted to go back to Germany again.

But I have to say, the guy that really made the most difference in convincing me to go back to Germany and play again and even to go back to Berlin was Fritz Rau. Because he did more to explain to me German history and German politics than anybody else ... and I have to thank him because he gave me the basic information that I needed to have a better understanding of what was really going on in the country.

It was not always easy to convince the other guys in the band that they should go back, but I think the other comments that I made throughout the years will reinforce what I say about the respect that I have for the people there and the fact that Germany has turned out to be our strongest audience in Europe, and whenever we would do tours there, we would play more concerts in Germany than in any other country. Like in '88 we did eleven shows just in Germany.



MICHAEL:

We heard that you've been dissatisfied playing in Germany, because the people never really understood what you were singing about and saying in American English.

FRANK:

Not true - I've never said that. Here's the facts about Germany touring. The audience in Germany are the most avid - they don't make as much noise as they would in other places, because they don't understand what I'm saying - they're very attentive and the audiences are enthusiastic and those fans that I can talk to before I go into a concert hall or after the show have been really friendly and they're very dedicated ... and I got mail from them all the time and it's been that way for 10 or 15 years.

MICHAEL:

During your concerts in Germany it was quite obvious, that you were talking to the audience slowly in order to help them understand you.

FRANK:

Well, you have to learn how to do it. Supposed somebody came to my country and I could understand just a little bit of what they were saying to me . I like their music, but I'm trying to find out what they're saying - if they speak in a fast conversational tone - I'm dead - I have no clue! And the other thing is, the places where you are performing, usually there is a lot of echo in the hall, so you know if you speak fast they won't understand any of it. It takes a while to figure that out and to remember to do it, and also you know that since there are limitations on how you can speak to them, you don't speak to them that much, because it slows down the show, if you have to speak very slowly - you can't stop after a song, say something slow and start again. I try to keep that type of communication to a minimum and also to make it as legible as possible.

The other thing that we do is for audiences in countries that don't speak English, we try to play mostly songs that have already been on an album. So that they all know the words - either that or we play instrumental music ...and don't usually play new material that hasn't been on an album, because there is no chance they will understand the words.

Marketing And Religion

MICHAEL:

... we had such a good time reading your book "The Real Zappa Book". There's so much that you notice when you travel ... we are not like the other tourists only interested in sights ... we are watching. At night we may just watch TV and on Sunday morning as well ... that's where you meet censorship again, and all the church business. One of the pastors called Dr. Robert Schuller was on last Sunday - he must be one of the soft ones?

FRANK:

Oh - he's a sneaky one. This is the guy who looks like Batman. Alright, here's what you have to know about Dr. Schuller. First of all he was investigated several years ago, because he has this place called 'The Crystal Cathedral', ok?, well it's supposed to be a cathedral and because it is, it's tax exempt. Church is a tax exempt in the United States. However, he decided to put on a concert with Laurence Welch/Welk ? in this place and charged admission. You know who Laurence Welch is? Ok, Laurence Welch is the kind of band that retired people like to dance to, so he was putting on a concert and charged the admission with Laurence Welch, and the IRS says no, and went after him for tax evasion for that. But apparently somebody fixed it because it evaporated. He made the news last year - do you remember Sergeant Higgins ... they had a videotape of this guy being hung in Beirut, he was taken hostage, he was part of the US-UN-Peace-Keeping-Force and the US Television had pictures of this guy hanging from a rope. So this generated yet another US-Hostage-Crisis. These are periodic media events: Hostage crises. And they're always supposed to test the US presidents: how will George Bush respond in this hostage crisis. You know what he did? He called for Dr. Schuller to come from California to the White House to pray with him. Does that give you any confidence about this administration? He needed religious advice from this particular individual and then after entering the White House Dr. Schuller gave a couple of mini press conferences just outside the White House talking about what he and the president has discussed. Does that worry you at all? Is this a world leader we're talking about here? And have you noticed Dr. Schuller's



son, did you see him? He has a son

MICHAEL:

... yes, we saw him last sunday in a broadcast from Crystal Cathedral, hugging and weeping with another pastor in front of the TV Cameras just to impress the spectators and to get money out of them ...

FRANK:

... well they do that from time to time, it's a little homosexual kind of a thing. Anyway, he's got a son - I can't remember the son's name. That other guy wears that smock like he does. I guess Dr. Schuller is trying to break him into the business and I watched the show one day when he allowed his son to do the sermon. Now the son is about as intriguing as Dan Quayle, our sub-stupid, sub-human vice president. So anyway, he gives this long boring sermon, and the allegory in this sermon, i.e. it's topic was: fertilizer, like spreading shit on the lawn. And he was telling this really long drawnout anecdote about "He and his father fertilizing the lawn of someone's home" and spreading the shit on the lawn and all this stuff, and it took fifteen minutes to him to finally to get to the punchline, which was "And my father said to me, you sure can spread it!"

And there wasn't any laughter or applause, and it was so stupid, I mean he's trying to create this dynasty of dynamic religious personalities, it's really pathetic, You know the things that they sell: calendar with little quotations that'll keep you going month to month. In spite of all that Dr. Schuller is a mild one. The really deranged ones are Swaggart, or this guy Robert Tilton, have you seen him yet? He's still on. The most dangerous is Pat Robertson?

MICHAEL:

Now we understand more about the specific relationship between state and church in the United States that you mentioned. Wouldn't you consider the whole situation over in Europe to be totally different ... not so obvious?

FRANK:

Hm, there's another kind of pressure in countries outside the US that doesn't involve newly formed cults. These Christian organisations I would call them "well-to-do cults", ok? I think an equal amount of evil is perpetrated by the older churches in other countries.

MICHAEL:

... but I wonder why especially in America people go to church so much. People in Germany don't go to church - period.

FRANK:

Oh, some do. If the church is still in business, it means that somebody is going there and they're donating.

MICHAEL:

Yes, but business does not mean anything over there, because the preachers are paid by the state. So they do not need a community to support them. It's a system that keeps itself up. ... like public education for instance ... Older people go to church, but not like here - the whole range.

FRANK:

I'm not sure that church attendance is so great in the United States as it is the reliance on religious theory and consumption of religious broadcasting.

MICHAEL:

For example we know people in Wilmington, North Carolina and they go to church - everybody, every sunday, all the family, and they don't miss one service.

FRANK:

But the Carolinas are "socially retarded area", the whole southern part of the United States is a socially retarded area.

MICHAEL:

You are talking about racial discrimination?

FRANK:

Yes, true, but the other factor that people forget about the southern region is the amount of intermarriage that has already occurred there, and so there are certain genetic defects come to the fore when you have a large intermarriage population. That means regression And in fact Utah is another state, which is basically owned by the Mormon church, which also has a lot of intermarriage. And because



this type of intermarriage there is a large proportion of blind people in Utah. That's why when you go across the street, instead of just a stop light that you can see, they have stop lights that make a coocoo noise to tell you when to cross the street - that's true!

Looking For Miracles

MICHAEL:

Well I wonder why people get so addicted to religion?

FRANK:

Well, here's my theory. The reason why there's such power to these kinds of cults in United States has to do with the fact that you can clean anything in the name of religion and once you do - once you're in the religion business - you're tax exempt, that means that as a businessman you have an advantage that other businessmen don't. And every church, large and small, takes advantage of this tax exemption. And there're other dispensations that go out to people because they say they're men of god or involved in religious practices.

The other thing that is important here is when Ronald Reagan became president, one of the first things that he did during his administration was to put this country into an economic depression, that happened in about 1982. We were really in bad financial condition because of Reaganomics . A lot of people lost their homes, lost their jobs - they were out in the street, and they had nothing ! When everything has been fairly ok for a bunch of years, and suddenly you are homeless, what do you do? You're reaching out for anything! Here come all these religious organisations, not only on television but in terms of ministries that would go into the street and offer - we' ll put this in quotes - "help" to these suffering individuals. But there is a payback: if you take help from the church you then have to work for the church.

The other thing that these cults have done is they're going into the prisons, and they have these programs where they'll take prisoners and say. "We're gonna give you religious traing and you'll be born again. Well, at the point where this criminal says he's born again and he's taking Jesus into his heart he is eligible for early release. And when he comes out, where do you think he goes to work? He works for these ministers!

It's my theory that most right-wing fascists of these organisations are putting together their own army out of guys from prison. It's kind of like what Hitler did when he got his brown-shirts together. Only this is being done for Jesus. And this is going on now and has been going on for years.

MICHAEL:

Well, this would be different from Johnny Cash playing in front of the prisoners of San Quentin!?

FRANK:

Oh, definitely. This is not Johnny Cash entertaining the troops. This is missionaries going in there and saying ok, here's a bible, we're gonna heal you with prayer. And then the guy says "I'm born again!" and the next thing you know he's out of the jail. And how many American political leaders had got arrested during Watergate, went in there and suddenly got born again and then came out, and at least one of this now is a famous "cross-vertiser" (cross + advertiser) for these Christian groups.

Them or Me

MICHAEL:

What was their reaction to your recently published book "The Real Zappa Book" where you revealed the connexions between state and church?

FRANK:

Nothing whatsoever. They won't answer anything that's in there, because: how can they? - it's right! All the whole business about the tax exemptions and the rest of that. They don't want to challenge that!

MICHAEL:

So they wouldn't charge you ...?

FRANK:

With what? - Slander? - Libel? - They can't!



MICHAEL:

And you would take it in case they would come up with anything like that? Especially California is so famous for the fact that people sue each other ... the attorneys are quite special - when we rented the car they made us take out a coverage of several million dollars - so you are not afraid of anything like that -

FRANK:

No. In order for them to sue me, first of all they have to prove that I lie. Secondly, they have to prove that I've damaged them. Now has anything that I've ever said or done taken a nickel out of their pocket - I doubt it. The drawback for them is that if they were to attack me, it would be a big newsstory. And I talk just as well as they do on television. And I don't think they want me saying what's in that book on TV. Because if they attack me, it will prove my point, what a bunch of ... bastards they actually are.

MICHAEL:

So this all depends on the wrong or right government then, if you are talking about tax laws. If there was the 'right' government, they may change the tax laws, and then these things would change.

FRANK:

The law doesn't even have to be changed, it only needs to be enforced. What I say in the book is: the law as it stands now is being violated by these ministries, because the law says specifically: if you have a tax exemption for religious purposes, you may not lobby for or against any legislation, or for or against any candidate. And most of these television ministries have given massive amounts of money to the Republican Party. They support all the Republican candidates ... they are into politics business. Have you watched Pat Robertson's show? Oh, you have to see it to believe it. It's pure politics, it's hardly any religion in there at all, the religion is just window-dressing. This is the guy who going to run again for president.

MICHAEL:

Have you ever thought of leaving the country? All this must sometimes get to you. Although you do have a nice hideout here, but still ...

FRANK:

Well, I've thought of it a couple of times, but you know ... the difficulty is this: in English, I'm fairly intelligent, in anybody else's language, I don't exist. I'm too old to learn another language. There's no way that I could develop any communication skills in anybody else's language, so I'm stuck here. I'm American, there it is. I happen to like this country ... I happen to dislike its government, especially as it's been constituted for the last ten years, I think that's the worst thing that's ever happened to this country. But there's no question that from time to time I get very upset about what's going on here. - I couldn't say or do the things that I do in this country myself if I lived in a different country.

Digital Library

MICHAEL:

Have you ever thought of creating a digital library available on computer discs? It would be nice to have the entire lyrics of your songs and the background material that comes with them as a data base. That could be very useful for German listeners, in case they don't know the meaning of certain words or phrases that you use, or create, i.e. neologisms.

FRANK:

That would be a huge database. You know how hard it would be to take all the songs in my catalogue and provide the information that a non-American would need to have in order to understand the words. That would be an enormous data base. For example, the first time we played in England, and I had to do an interview with somebody when the album "Absolutely Free" was out . There's a song on it called "I'm losing status in the high school", and a line in the song says, " a bunch of pompom girls look down their nose at me". Well, nobody in England knew what a 'pompon girl' was; they don't have cheerleaders there, see, and so I was confronted with the fact that it never occurred to me that outside the US they don't even have cheerleaders. So how do you explain what a cheerleader is to a person who is so sophisticated that their society is evolved to the point where they don't need them. - So there's a lot of stuff in the songs about the way things are here , and unless somebody has come here and looked at it like you guys have, it doesn't make any sense at all.



Censorship

MICHAEL:

We feel that the lyrics in your songs must be considered as something like a 'poem', that gives the listener room for interpretation - and sometimes one wonders if you actually invented things ...

FRANK:

... I don't. Usually, it's tied to something. I wish I could sit down and explain it all to people who really want to know - in fact, most people don't want to know because they don't even figure it out. And what you are going through with the lyrics is something typically European; most of the US listeners don't even pay any attention to this. As I said, it's a post-literate society, so you are talking about the stuff as if it's literature, and literature means nothing to the audience here.

So you think that what I have to say would be really appealing to a US audience, because I'm talking about their stuff. But they don't ask, they don't give a fuck. Because for one thing the material is never played on the radio, and there are many stores that won't even carry the records.

But talking of a live performance, that's a different story. There we do have the possibility to change the lyrics to a song right there on the stage. I don't whether you've ever been to a concert and seen the way that happens, but very strange things can happen in the show, if you're working with a song that everybody already knows the words to, and you just change a few while you're singing, to make it special for that occasion, based on something that happened in the news. And for the last, let's say, five or six years, maybe a little more, that's been a regular feature of the concerts.

In fact, there are these three guys from Germany, Dirk, Tom and Tommy, I don't know their last names, but they came to almost every concert in Germany in '88, and they would hold up a big sign in the audience that would say: "Frank, what's the secret word for tonight?"

(Dirk Weitz, Tom Nagla und Thommy Mikkat, the author)

And so every time I would see the sign I would just come up with a word, and that word would be like a virus that would infect every song during the show. And once I knew that there were kids in the audience that wanted to see that happen, we just did it more and more and more. There will be some good examples of that in this album that's coming out called "The best band you never heard in your life". In fact, on one- it's a quadruple CD- a lot of the stuff is from the German concerts, especially from the one in Würzburg. And I see the sign in the audience, and I read it, and you'll hear me, and you'll hear the results. In fact, I'll even play you a piece of the tape, so you can see what I'm talking about ...

MICHAEL:

Talking about videos and people watching videos - isn't that scary that more and more people just stay at home, sit in front of their TV and watch video tapes all day long?

FRANK:

Yeah, you think that's scary? Then you go out in the street, and you can be shot - isn't that more scary? In New York, even in California. ... in fact, they'll bring it to your home, they have what they call 'drive-by-shootings', where people just go through a neighbourhood and shoot into your house, you don't even have to leave ... this is what the gangs do in certain parts of L.A., and that's only possible because we have a government that lets people own machineguns.

MICHAEL:

We definitely don't want to create the impression that we believe these things only happen in the US - you cannot blame it on this country...

Nazis In America

FRANK:

Look, you have to make a distinction between the citizens of a country and the government of a country. Same thing to be said about the Soviet Union - I like the citizens, but up until recently I haven't been that enthusiastic about their government. Same thing about every country ... people are usually o.k., unfortuna-



tely they wind up with governments representing them that are sometimes 'not very o.k.', and in other cases dangerous.

MICHAEL:

Although, in each country, there is such and such.

FRANK:

Well, in Germany, you have the Republicans, I heard they have at least 10 %, or is that just in Bavaria? The other thing is that they started gaining strength when Reagan went to Bitburg, because of that point a lot of people who had Nazi sympathy said, "See, it's okay, he came here to give honor to our soldiers, and we are coming out of the closet now, and he's with us." But also in the US, we have neo Nazi groups, not just in California. The bulk of them were imported by the US government - they brought in all the scientists they could round up after World War II, and their families, and they moved them to, I believe Huntsville, Alabama. They falsified all of the documents, and they were protected, and it's no wonder that there is a certain Nazi kind of a twinge to the behaviour in the South - the US government brought these people in and resettled them here so they could use their brain. In fact, the guy who designed the space suit that John Glenn used when he went up in the rocket, he was a Nazi scientist who used to put Jews in these chambers and suck all the air out ... this is what he used to do! This isn't secret information I'm telling you, this part of a documentary that I saw on US television. - And the other thing is: do you know how we got into the germ warfare business? The Japanese developed germ warfare, and at the time the Japanese were number one, the Russians were number two, the Germans were number three, and the US was number zero in germ warfare technology. - There used to be a place in Japan called Mukden, and there was a Japanese commandant who ran this camp, and he took US prisoners and used them as guinea pigs in his camp. In the end of the war, instead of trying this man as a war criminal, the US government made a deal - in fact it was general McArthur who made the deal- that this man would not be prosecuted, that all of his germs and all of his research would be picked up and moved to Fort Detrick, Maryland. And that is how we got into the germ business. - Again, this is not secret information, this was a show on ABC television, on a program called 20/20, where they interviewed some of the survivors from the camp.

My Inspiration

MICHAEL:

Would you mind changing to the subject of ART now? Cal Schenkel, Donald Roller Wilson and A. West have been working for you ...

FRANK:

In case of Cal Schenkel, I saw his portfolio and I hired him, he worked for me for the longest period of any of them. In the case of D.R.Wilson, I saw his catalogue and asked to license some of the paintings to use in album covers. In the case of A. West, he showed me a portfolio, and I hired him to do the "Broadway, the hard way"- cover, and then to do the illustrations of the book.

MICHAEL:

Have you ever thought of composing music for an artist?

FRANK:

To commemorate his paintings? To just communicate? Like Mussorgski's "Pictures of an exhibition"? I haven't so far, but I could... Mostly inspirations that I have come from what I see on television news, what I see in the environment around me, of which the paintings may be a part. But most of the stuff that influences me are all things that make me mad.

MICHAEL:

... and that's where you get your energy from ...

We would like to thank you, Frank, for this most interesting interview, for having us here in your private home, in your studio, and for sharing this evening with us.



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