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Unedited transcript by Rob Young

## Scott Walker

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[I tell him I was impressed with the record]

**SW:** Well thank you - it's so unusual for people to just say that out to me, I just feel like I brought in the plague or something. If people just said they liked it upfront it would make me feel so much better. [laughs]

**RY:** The studio seems to be where your creativity is focused - I wouldn't want to see *The Drift* performed live, it would reduce the impact so much..

**SW:** [laughs] I wouldn't want to see it! No, it would be nigh impossible. It would be first of all, financially prohibitive, there's no way you could tour it because you couldn't take a force like that out every night. And if you did it for one night, you'd have a nervous breakdown, you know? There's no way. I've been asked that, so now I'm toying with writing something I could actually do some gigs with, because... but it would have to be scaled down. A lot. I'd have to take four or five players. But the problem with me is that I'm an either/or man. My imagination either gets very big, or it ends with a whimper, like all the end songs on all my records. It's very small or it's very big, but somewhere in between always sounds too normal to me. You know, like a band.

**RY:** I've been listening to *Tilt* and *The Drift* back to back, and even *Tilt* has recognisable rock structures here and there, but on the new one you've really unlocked the songs from that reliance on anything recognisable.

**SW:** I know, it's true, of course, all the stuff that I have, the basic tracks are rock structured, it rocks, but it's only because I came from that. I started as a rock musician so that's always there, and it will always be there as, I don't particularly want to go into a strictly avant garde position or a rock position or anything else. But that will always be the basis of whatever I have. So one or two tracks, like the first track - it rocks, it rocks out, so that'll always be there.

**RY:** Since virtually all the tracks involve these fine, knife-edge arrangements, I assume you never really hear it until you're right there putting it together in the studio - so it must be a little like being deaf to the entirety of the song until that moment.

**SW:** Well, it usually is. I mean it's a question of keeping it all in my head until I get in there, and that includes drum parts and everything else. So... but this one, I actually bought a keyboard and I've been able to program the drum parts in, so I could actually hear what it would be, and I was actually able to take a lot of the stuff in and say, this is the part, you have to play this. And of course, they play it, and they play it of course beautifully, and sometimes they'll add something that's wonderful as well. I'm lucky, cos I work with great players, I've worked with them for years, it's virtually the same guys in there. They're used to all the stuff that's going in there [laughs], they're not surprised. And we can run a herd of cattle through there, and nobody would blink.

**RY:** You've got a core group now - where did you pick them up?

**SW:** Initially it was just listening to various records, and if you're asking for certain players, they'll send you demos of the stuff they've been on. I can't really remember now, it's been so many years. I remember how I got Pete Walsh, cos he worked on *New Gold Dream*, with Simple Minds, and of all the guys I had sent to me, his sound I identified with. And the others came through various demos and tapes and whatever. And slowly but surely that sound was created..

**RY:** Are you rehearsing some of the songs with them before you go into the studio?

**SW:** No, not a lot, cos they get it together very quickly. It also helps that they're readers, because although I don't cut back on studios or players ever - I want the best thing I can get, I'll pick the best people I can possibly get. I do have to have players, because I don't have that luxury of rehearsing guys over and over again in band rooms, you

know? I have to be able to get guys who can get it together quickly. I like to record very quickly but this time it didn't work out that way. All the time is taken writing - writing the words which will inform the rest of it. Getting the words exactly right. So, that tells you everything you're going to do. Then, when you get in the studio it should take.. well, for this kind of record it's fast - a couple of months, month and a half, for mixing everything. But this went on for a year, and it was... guys were sick, we couldn't get studio time, people were on tour... So sometimes we were only in the studio only two days a month. But in a sense that added tension, because we knew we had to get it then - and everybody was really down to it. One of the prerequisites of working on one of my records is that everybody's got to have a sense of humour. Cos, you know, we would all die if we didn't, in that situation. I've always said, I don't want a lot of guys in black, brooding around the studio noodling on things. It goes past that.. So, it's always good to work with those guys because of that.

**RY:** When you get the orchestral players in, do you give them any sense of what's coming - what's going to be required for each song?

**SW:** In this case, I had to get special people who I felt.. because the string part on something like 'Flugleman' was so dense, and it couldn't sound stringy. So they had to play it all kinds of ways. The first section of it, even before it gets to the middle screaming string thing, it took nearly a whole session just for them to get.. cos they had to play it in one continuous take. And to make all the changes and stay that dense and keep everything under control. It was very difficult. So I used someone like Philip Sheppard who was a string player himself, who could actually say no no no, give them technical reasons why it was sounding too stringy, why if I had to have less of that or whatever. Mostly it's just a question of getting the guys in the rhythm to get it all as shaved down as they can. Cos each album I've cut down more and more and more. This album has no real arrangements - there are no beautiful string arrangements or anything like that. It's about big blocks of sound and noises, and things like that. It's only cos the lyric doesn't call for it. You always have to keep matching it to the lyric - there's no excess, or anything at all much left any more.

**RY:** It's like you've become a dramatist/dramaturge, as much as a musician.

**SW:** To me, see, I've been doing it for so long, it sounds normal. Somebody said to me the other day, that it's not songs any more, it's something else - I don't know what it is, but it isn't... But to me it's songs, but I can understand what they mean. Because narrative, and people have gone off narrative - even myself - I decided to try narrative again, so I tried a couple of narrative things to see if I could do that again. But I also kept breaking it up with the other thing as well, so there wasn't too much of it. Some guy strumming away, telling you the story of his life...

**RY:** What kind of stuff were you listening to in the build-up? Before *Tilt* you said you've been listening to Beethoven and Bartok, was there anything that informed this one?

**SW:** I think all my listening days are pretty well cemented, you know what I mean? And also, while I'm working on a record I hardly listen to any other music, especially while I'm recording, cos you might have a terrible day, and you'll hear a fabulous record and you'll want to ditch everything. So, I hadn't been listening to a lot of music. So I can't say on this one there had been any particular influences.

**RY:** At what point did the idea of building this percussion box come in?

**SW:** The big box? We simply... well, I couldn't hear in my head... I know pretty much everything that can be used in percussion, and I couldn't hear in my head anything that was gonna create that noise. So I realised we had to build... So I just gave the guy the specifications. There's somebody making a film about all of this, and you actually see the guy comes in in the morning and builds it in the studio. It's a 5 by 5 foot box, and we put it on cinder blocks, and then Alistair Molloy eventually began beating it with a big cinder block, so we got that real sound.. that's the sound, that's what the sound would be... Because with all my things, they take on nightmare proportions, so everything's out of proportion. It's usually very big, so it's like a dream, so this had to fall into line with that. And later we used it for this song, 'Psoriatic'. We then drilled a hole in the top, and the mics were all inside the box underneath, and stuck a mic in the middle, and we got these big dustbins and moved them around to get... you know, it's about the shell game. And of course the pea became a giant bowling ball that was slowed down.

**RY:** the studio is this space for psychodrama.

**SW:** It is, yeah, it just brings everything down again.

**RY:** What about the sleeve artwork - what was the brief?

**SW:** Basically I just gave him some information about it, that's what it should do. Because that's the idea of the album: the idea is that it starts with something we know - a political issue, or something we know, and then it drifts into another world, and into something else. So all kinds of disparate elements then take place. So that's all, I just sketched something out, and then he perfected it. Only, not the words.

**RY:** The title, *The Drift*, there are resonances around the word - random movement, also a snowdrift, the opposite, where things coagulate and become solid, and the sense of 'I get your drift' -

**SW:** [Smiling] That's it, yeah. I'm glad you did, because that's the idea of listening to something like this, is that you bring your own interpretation. And nine times out of ten it's probably better. So those are good thoughts about it.

**RY:** Do you surprise yourself with the lyrics sometimes, as they come through?

**SW:** Of course. Always. I always surprise myself with the music, or the lyrics. You hear that from writers all the time, especially novelists, they'll say, God, I don't know how this happened, how I did it. And I have that all the time.

But you have to wait for that - that's what takes the time. You gotta wait til that next piece fits, and it requires a lot of patience and frustration. If you rush it, it always sounds wrong. It never rings true.

**RY:** Do the backbone of the lyrics tend to come in a rush and then you start working on it and refining it?

**SW:** No, it varies. You might get a run of lyrics, but generally, you might get a 'paragraph' or a sentence, and then suddenly down the line you get... Like for instance, the songs 'Buzzers'. I started writing it during the Milosevic thing that was going on, and I left it or a while. But then I came across this little news thing in the paper or a magazine, which eventually the newsreader reads out, but it was actually a news clip - and then I started thinking about the horse, the evolution of the horse, and brought that element into it.

**RY:** And is that meant to contrast with what was going on with ethnic cleansing - an enforced version of evolution?

**SW:** There are some images from that.. no, it's essentially a plea for love, really. Cos it's... the horses' faces lengthen, so it's more about longing for the time a spiritual face can stay with us... So it isn't actually about the lengthening in that sense, it's about lengthening of time, that you can hold that. Most of my stuff is about frustration, of being unable to hold on to a spiritual moment, always losing it. And it's the frustration of not understanding what it is. So in this case that's how that relates - they lengthen, why can't I have this thing lengthen, face lengthen for me. Their faces lengthen, only in another way. [claps hands while speaking last part]

**RY:** Has that sense of frustration increased as time goes on, for you?

**SW:** Yes, because it's an impossible thing, you can't hang onto it. You just get glimpses of it, and so you have to desperately try and give an idea of it, and that's all you can do.

**RY:** I wanted to talk about some of the other songs. I guess the whole album drifts towards death, blackness, and silence, and a lot of individual songs have that movement. There's also a powerful current of disease throughout...

**SW:** Well, that one was maybe the toughest song I ever wrote, for ages, that song ['Cue (Flugleman)']. You did pick up on that, at the beginning of it was rather a meditation on all these plagues that are coming that we have no answer for. We put it out of our minds. But they are coming, and they're there. It started out that way, and then it became something else, as with all my songs, it all comes back to the self in some way - not the ego self, but the other self. And so in the end it always ends like that. So, yeah, you're on the right track on that one - to start with, anyway.

**RY:** 'Jesse' seems like one of the centre pieces of the record, with its complex image of the towers and Elvis's twin brother.. how that image came up, it reminded me of how Dali used to see one image in another..

**SW:** That seeing one image in another has a great spiritual force, but with something of the hubris of the Twin Towers - that's just American muscle. Those skyscrapers - that's pumping yourself up. So I was looking for something that also didn't have any reflexive quality - in a sense it came down to Elvis's dead twin brother - we've never seen him, something he imagines, but he can't really have it. It's once again a frustration - he can't have it. Then it moves into the other American image, the prairie, so you have a horizontal and then a vertical image going on as well. And finally it zeroes back in to the existential moment - the self, for the very end of it.

**RY:** What's your relationship with America at the moment? I gather you don't go back there very much...

**SW:** No, [laughs] I don't. I would say if I could compound all the time I've been back there in the last 40 years, it might reach to three months. So it's hard for me, I'm as fascinated as anyone when they come over here, I curated the Meltdown Festival a few years ago, and I had people like Elliott Smith coming over, I was standing with the Brits looking over at them, thinking, they're kind of like from outer space, you know? If you're not there, you're fascinated by them, you know? That's not a negative thing, it's just an observation. I'll tell this story for the umpteenth time, it's going to be in a lot of interviews: A cousin of mine wrote me a few years ago, and she'd been in Los Angeles and went to one of those big megastores, Tower Records or something, and went to W, couldn't find me there. Went up to the counter, and said, 'I'm looking for a Scott Walker CD, can you help me?' And he says, 'Hmm, Scott Walker', calls his assistant over, says, 'Do we have any Scott Walker CDs?' And the guy says, 'Oh, yeah, he's the English singer, he's in the international section'. So that kind of sums up my relationship really, with the United States.

**RY:** Is there a kind of satisfaction with that, at some level?

**SW:** The last time around, I said, I'm always just a floater, I don't really know where I am any more, and I took a weird solace in that. But since then, I thought to myself, finally I must be that - as that man in America described me. So I guess that's what I am [laughs].

**RY:** Maybe you've become an honorary Brit in a way..

**SW:** Mm, well I'm part of the woodwork. When people discuss me, they don't tend to think that I'm outside any more. It's always, we can call him up.. I know a lot of artists here, so...

**RY:** There's a nice little tradition of Americans, like TS Eliot, becoming more English than the English..

**SW:** Yeah, I know, I know.. Well, he really did - dressed like it an everything.

**RY:** When 9/11 happened, did that galvanize something?

**SW:** It was astounding, because a lot of people started writing things after it, but a lot of people said, I have to digest it for a few [years].. Usually I suppose I would have had that reaction, but I actually wrote this about a month after it happened. And it came together pretty quickly, so obviously it had a dramatic effect on me. As for what transpired afterwards, I mean, I just couldn't believe what was going on. I never actually believed, even the night before, when they said they were going to do Iraq, I never believed it. I thought, well, Saddam will stand down, and this is a big bluff, and then they did it, and everybody just watched. What can you say, it's the way it's turned out.

**RY:** Does that kind of thing make you feel even more alienated from the States?

**SW:** Well, definitely from this regime for sure. It's something I don't really get. But whenever that happens, I never really think of it relating to me [as an American] particularly. I've been here so long, it doesn't register in any way that I'm part of it, an American part of it. So that's probably another indication of the split.

**RY:** A lot of your focus seems to have been on the European atrocities in any case. Have you been travelling in the Balkans?

**SW:** Oh no I haven't travelled to those places, no, though I've lived in Europe... But the European thing has always been with me. That's why I came here, because of European cinema. I tend to think that way anyway.

**RY:** With European cinema, does anything do it for you now? When you first arrived it was the heyday of Godard, Pasolini, Tarkovsky, Bresson - that pantheon. Now that that's a gone era, has anything replaced it?

**SW:** Well, there isn't a lot. But funnily enough, in the last year, I've seen two great French films and a great Belgian one recently. I saw *The Child, L'Enfant*, you know, of course I've seen *Hidden* - fantastic film - and I've seen *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*. You get a run, fantastic run, suddenly. *Hidden's* like an old fashioned art movie, it's almost back together with those guys. So, they do surprise you now and then, just when you've given up. Cos the French make, what is it, like 200 films or something a year, and some of them are shocking, compared with what they used to do. I think if they get one or two good releases, they're really lucky. Out of 200 hundred films. Shocking.

**RY:** Have you seen *The Werckmeister Harmonies*, the Bela Tarr movie?

**SW:** I've seen it, with the big whale [laughs]

**RY:** Somehow that came to mind listening to the new album..

**SW:** Yes, I've seen that one. It's funny you should mention that, because the guy [from *Magnet*] I was on the phone with earlier, he's seen the latest one, he said the title, I said, I don't know that. Maybe it's not here yet. He was very excited about that director. But yeah, he's interesting, it's a very Eastern European sense that he has. I like that.

**RY:** A lot of space unresolved, and then big crazy gestures..

**SW:** That's an appealing thing.

**RY:** What about literature at the moment, if that's informing you.. lyrically, Celan?? WG Sebald?

**SW:** I know all those people - I read Celan a long time ago. But literature, it's kind of gone the same way. There seems to be too much of everything now - too much bad things. There's too much music, there's too much third rate literature. So it's hard to get those... I mean, what have I been reading recently... I read a book... oh no, I won't bring that up, it was not a very good book... it was called *Out Stealing Horses* [by Per Petterson], I was so desperately looking for a European novel... So you wind up reading the people that you wait for, Roth or Updike... bring it in..

**RY:** I don't know how much Sebald you've read, but I was going to recommend him to you..

**SW:** Yes, I know, *The Emigrants*, and *Rings Of Saturn*, yeah..

**RY:** In 'Cue', is that a reference to the Aids epidemic?

**SW:** I mentioned before how that started off, with plagues.. I don't want to get too specific about those things. But it really is a song that is so odd, so strange, in all the turns it takes, that I'm kind of loath to talk about it, because it started off as one thing, then it became something rather personal... So I'm kind of loath to deconstruct that, cos, why did I bother to construct that in the first place? [laughs] It's hard enough... That one really is the kind of song that almost resists deconstruction.

**RY:** I know you also didn't want to say too much about 'Jolson And Jones', but I had to ask about the line about the donkey in the streets of Galway...

**SW:** Well, it's only cos.. Allan Jones.. You probably don't know the song 'Donkey Serenade' do you? It's a very famous song, it's like the song 'Ja-Da', a very famous old song from the 20s and 30s, one of those kind of things - even before I was born. And Allan Jones was Jack Jones's father. Did you ever see *Night At The Opera*, the Marx Brothers? He's the romantic tenor in there. And he had a big hit with 'Donkey Serenade'. So you ought to try and hear it, cos it's a funny song. So, there are quotes from 'Donkey Serenade' in there. And of course, that spurred in all the other donkey

stuff that went on.. And there are quotes from... I can't remember now, an Al Jolson song - so that's why it's called 'Jolson + Jones'.

**RY:** In 'Cossacks Are' there are some lines that sound like they're sampled from reviews.

**SW:** they are! They're cribbed.. no, they're not reviews of me. They're cribbed from reviews - most of them are backhanded compliments, sort of, one of the ongoing things. There's also a quote from George Bush in the middle, I remember when Chirac was over in America rather recently, he was saying, somebody said in the press conference, 'Are you going to take him out to your ranch, Mr President?' And he said, 'Well, I'm looking for a good cowboy', and I thought, I'll put that in, cos that's a real backhanded compliment. Chirac took it that way, too.

**RY:** In 'Escape', with the Looney Tunes refs - is that you doing the Donald Duck voice?

**SW:** [cheeky grin] Well, we'll never know, will we?

**RY:** That is a creepy moment - so, what's Donald Duck doing in there, saying 'What's up Doc?'

**SW:** [startled] You got that? Fantastic! You're the only one who's been able to understand what he was saying - it's interesting. Well I'll leave it at that. I'm duly impressed. I had a guy who just couldn't understand it, and the more he drank, the less he understood it...

**RY:** What's Donald doing in that song?

**SW:** I don't know.. [mumbles..] Give that a week, just play with that one for a while? Cos, you know, Donald doesn't say that...

**RY:** I know, it's Bugs says that..

**SW:** Bugs says that..

**RY:** Who's the dedicatee, Mr K?

**SW:** Oh, it's because there's a composer called Kurtag that had that chord sequence, and I thought well I'll thank him cos I love the chord sequence, but then I discovered he took it from Charles Ives, *The Unanswered Question*, so I should have said 'Thank you Mr I', [laughs]. Cos, you know, he's famous for quoting people. So that was a missed opportunity.

**RY:** And there's a couple of references to the Kabbala in that song too, what's that about?

**SW:** Yes, I honestly forget what a lot of that is, I think it had to do with just the secretive society business, and conspiracy theory, I think I was trying to match those two together.

**RY:** Zionism?

**SW:** Well, somebody certainly thinking, I mean, I don't for one minute believe there's a Zionist threat, but.. you know.

**RY:** I looked up the kelippot, and apparently they're little shells containing sparks of divine light, some can be redeemed and some are irretrievably blackened... seems appropriate for this record.

**SW:** Yeah. You've done some good work, you been digging away. You and Madonna, I guess.. [laughs] Let's really hope that it's not associated with that.

**RY:** And the last, death bed song

**SW:** All my albums tend to end with whimpers, like you were talking about Eliot earlier. Yeah, all the people named in there either don't exist, or they're dead, and if they are dead, they don't exist any more, in reality.

**RY:** Is this someone's life, and the things they loved, flashing before their eyes..

**SW:** Well that's another good interpretation you see, as good as mine [chuckles]

**RY:** In Clara, that has that theatrical sense - with the wind machine sound, and the meat punching..

**SW:** You mean the basses? That's purely great string playing. And until it gets to the crowd section, that's the first time we use a machine, where the narration starts. So it's purely just great playing. Yeah, the meat punching, that's an idea that came to me because, she was going, especially in her section, you sing quite a beautiful melody, and I needed an undercurrent of evil. Cos it is a fascist love song, essentially. I didn't want to do some cliched thing with strings. So that came to me, so we go the side of pork in, and made poor Alistair punch it. It's pathetic - this guy, he's one of the greatest percussionists in Europe, and he not only does rock sessions, he plays with Boulez, Stockhausen, all these people, and I always subject him to some kind of awful thing, you know. He's been working with me so long that it's OK, he just ignores me.. [laughs] but the thing about him is, he's such a fantastic actor/percussionist. I

remember when we were doing 'The Cockfighter', and I was looking for something at the beginning for this thing clawing its way inside a shell, the nails inside a shell. So we were looking at all the stuff he'd brought in, and there was this big gourd, with the coarse beads on the outside, a Brazilian instrument. And I said, that's perfect. So I explained what I wanted, and he went out into the studio, said Turn out all the lights, and we did it and he did this movement and it was fantastic. He gets so involved with it, you can hear him scream and shout at the end of it, when he's finished punching it so hard and with such involvement. And many of them are like that, the guys I work with. Great actors, actor-musicians.

**RY:** 'Hand Me Ups', about celebrity TV guy and his children.

**SW:** Yeah, he takes it too far, he's jealous of his children. And he wants to be the child himself, and a celebrity. I wrote that during the probably the first 'Big Brother', one of those awful things. That's why you hear the children screams. And there's some quotes there from *The Iliad*. So.. there we are.

**RY:** Do you take an interest in this current cult of celebrity that's intensifying at the moment?

**SW:** Yeah, well it is.. I don't watch television that much, but I would say that you can't avoid it - it's on the news, and everything you do tend to watch. It's growing all the time. It's like Martin Amis was saying: no one gets in on merit any more, it's all the other thing. So he [I?] was rather angry about that.

**RY:** Was the song based on anyone specific?

**SW:** [Emphatically] No. I just thought of this guy, this man who probably ... it's easy to imagine took it too far. In fact I was talking to Jarvis Cocker the other day, and it happened to be a day when this guy, this awful thing, he had murdered his little baby, a couple of weeks ago, because he was jealous of it, cos of the affection of the wife. We were talking about this song, he said, you'll never guess what I read today... This song at least has some comedy aspect, but that had nothing, you know, to save it..

**RY:** You seem to have an obsession with bass, the tubax, baritone guitars..

**SW:** It's the extremity, because then you get a wide spread, and it's the perfect place to fit where I was going to put the vocals. They're more dead centre then, if the strings are up there, and you leave more room for it. Because the one thing I really didn't want to do is baritone my way through it, because first of all, people get distracted - they'll either get comfortable with that, or they'll start to drown it, or whatever. If you're in that register, it has that kind of effect. So the idea was to get the vocals where the lyric was, at some kind of extremity and just to keep the tension going. And for me, I'm not very good after a couple of takes, it's usually one or two takes. If we had to be compiling something, the more I work the worse it gets. We'll always go back and say, Oh that was the best one, because of that time.. But I digress, I'm saying it only because you asked about the degree of bass.. I'd actually discovered, when I was working on the Pulp record, they brought that baritone guitar along, and I started playing with that, and that's when I really discovered it. In fact, I used Jarvis's baritone guitar for that. And poor Hugh, he had to.. he was absolutely brilliant, because he had to work out all these horrendous chords, I was trying to.. no way I could find to tell him how to shape them. And he would take ages in there just working on how to shape them into the next thing, and he was absolutely brilliant.

**RY:** Instrumentation/characterisation/sounds placed/guitar set against strings etc

**SW:** Well the lyric places them, and they're like I said, nothing is extraneous, nothing should be used.. even now today, people strumming along, to me that's unnecessary. So, you should be able to figure out something else now, there shouldn't be all that nonsense going on. Everything is considered - that's why it takes so long. Cos you have the lyric there, and you think, oh god, there it is, now what... what's it gonna be, what can I come up with to really bring it out? And that's the time consuming stuff.

**RY:** So it's like staring at the words, rotating them in your head, seeing what structures come up around them?

**SW:** That's right, I mean you have the spaces too, you gotta consider the spaces. I mean I have this mad analogy, and people look at me like I'm crazier than I am when I talk about it. But it's like, I actually see the words as soldiers in a field - that's my thing. So I can move them around, they have a certain space and everything else. So, after I've done that for a while, it starts to come to me, what each thing needs. It's a very abstract way to talk about it, but it's how I see it.

**RY:** How is it, living with that music? Is it difficult with that intensity?

**SW:** Well, the horrible thing about it is that it's become normal for me. To me, I hear it as just normal, [laughs] you know? I guess I've been working that way so long, that it's become a part of how I see or hear things. But once again, Chris Sharp [from 4AD] spotted something about it as well, is that the album is quite funny, because if you don't have that, and you're just doing all that thing, the art is not balanced, you don't have any balance. So you have to always remember that the people who are making this, it's an absurdist funny but the people who are making it are all engaged with that as well. So we have Donald Duck impersonations [laughs] to the extreme!

**RY:** Punching a pig is funny... and gruesome.

**SW:** Yeah, that's funny as well...

**RY:** What about the voice? Do you have to look after it in the intervals when you're not singing?

**SW:** Well I just don't use it, I look after it great! [laughs] I only start singing maybe a couple of months before I start. I'll sing the blues or something, I'm not a trained singer, so I get it in shape by instinct. But the one thing I do know is that, you don't always hear it with this kind of material, but it stays pretty fresh because you don't use it a lot. If you're touring and touring and touring, you can really wreck your voice. But if you just take it out of its case every now and then, you know... But singing is a great terror for me anyway, so it's something that I've never wholly looked forward to. When I'm home, I'm just singing for myself, it's OK, it's relaxing sometimes. But if I'm actually going to do it, especially for things like this, it's very worrying, it really gets on my nerves. But I have to capture that as well, cos that's part of it, part of what it is.

**RY:** Why is it terrifying?

**SW:** It's always been that way, you know, unless I've had a lot of drinks under my belt, which I used to do in the old days... It's so... so difficult to get it right. It seems such an incredible thing when the singing comes out of your mouth, but you've gotta catch - if you're doing paragraphs or sentences or whatever - you have to catch the phrasing right, it has to sound really right and real. And I'm just afraid I'm never gonna get it. And in my mind I never do. But at least I try. I get glimpses of it, but I never get it.

**RY:** Are you often disappointed with the finished recordings?

**SW:** Sometimes I'm not, I get a day when I'm fine. No no, we're getting better and better at getting this picture together. This picture of what this is. But because I never listen to my records once I've made them, I've spent how many years writing it, then I'm producing it and mixing it with Pete [Walsh, producer], then I'm arranging it and singing on it.. and I never want to see it again basically. I'll let someone else live with it for ten years. Cos I mean, you couldn't want to go hear it again, cos you would just hear mistakes. We're a bit purist in the sense that we don't use a lot of compression on our records, once again, it seems to cramp up the space and everything sounds very flat. There's so much compression on everything today, just to make it loud. Everybody wants to be louder than everybody else. Then when they get it to the radio station, they add more compression on it, the disc jockeys, cos they want to be loud and the station wants to be loud. So you have this flat, cramped, digi-noise. So, when you listen to our records the best thing to do is really crank them up loud, cos then you'll hear everything. You'll hear all the space and it'll be comfortable.

**RY:** In the first four or five years after *Tilt*, what were you doing? That was before the *Pola X* soundtrack came out..

**SW:** Oh yeah, I think I waited a couple of years before I started again - I'm always aware of the time, and I'm always now aware that I have to speed up. But I think I took some time off, and then I must have started, probably started 'Flugleman' around then. And maybe I started 'Clara' I'm not sure. Part of the reason for completing 'Clara' was because, uh, we have all this fascism in the air now, coming from all kinds of directions. And I'm never a fan of out and out protest songs - someone preaching to me and strumming - so my idea is to sneak up on it. And it was just another way of getting - it's a love song and it's very, um, interesting relationship - she was besotted by him, and had posters of him in her room and was a real fan. And she didn't need to die with him. In a way, it's funny but it's kind of moving. So I tried, it's really his dream that he's having about it all, and then of course it ends with me, or you, or anyone else talking at the end. But I digressed again.. Oh yes, the time it took. So then, I probably started, but then I wouldn't have completed it until all this stuff started. Two years, I probably started with Leos [Carax] then. And that went on for a couple of years. The music was easy - but it was him, calling me over to Paris, cos he's really fanatical about how he works, so I had to give him a lot of time, going back and forth watching him film... Fascinating, cos I love movies, and it was interesting, and I'm very fond of him.

**RY:** And Meltdown -

**SW:** David [Sefton] approached me, and I didn't know about that... It took me a long time to make up my mind to do that.

**RY:** Is that because it requires the curator to be a kind of figurehead, and that's the opposite of how you work?

**SW:** Yeah, it's very self-congratulatory. And there are all kinds of traps in something like that. But in the end it was fantastic, because it's like having the best birthday you ever had. Can you imagine having the money to bring over virtually anyone you want? So I'm glad I did it, finally. And, of course, I got to be great friends with David now..

**RY:** And how did the Pulp production come about?

**SW:** Geoff Travis came up to Charles [Negus Fancy, SW's manager], one night, and said, this would be a good idea, what do you think? And he said, let's talk about it, meet up.. and so then I met them and, that's what happened? I knew 'Common People', and one of their other singles, probably. Not a whole lot. But then Geoff took me to see them live, at some club, and so then I got to know more about it. And I saw them at another venue as well, I think it was the Barbican they did some gig.

**RY:** How did you choose to approach being the producer for that record?

**SW:** Well they tried something that was kind of fatal for them, which was that *Hardcore* album. Which for them was a real stretch, you know. And I think it's a classic thing, I think their audience just stepped back, on that one. But it was a brave thing to do. So I thought, well if they're interestd in doing something like that... but in a sense with the album they wanted to do, it was sort of... they were trying I think to warm up to that audience again. And also.. the only thing I thought about their records, when I finally got them all back, and listened to everything, was I felt that they're a band that has tons of character - that's what it's all built upon. Their production was so sterile, and that's one of the things they complained about - everything was very digital, very sterile. And I thought, if I'm going to do

anything, I'm going to give them a better recording than they've ever had, working with Pete, and just try and bring their character out as much as possible. So there we are..

**RY:** You just mentioned needing to speed up a bit - what do you mean?

**SW:** Well, I do, it's ridiculous - this whole last thing, cos like I said, it wasn't only all these things that I was doing - there were other things that were going on - a couple of deaths in the family and stuff like that. And then the record company changed regimes about five times - some were favourable, some weren't, and the next guy was favourable - it was like, he loves me, he loves me not.. And then, when it got to the last people, they were favourable as long as they could marry you up with somebody who was going to produce you, and basically give them a middle of the road record of I don't know what, standards, or something. Something they could market. And of course I wasn't 'willing to go back there'.. So we had to... So that took time.

**RY:** What about for the future - when you say you might need to speed things up, do you have things in your sights?

**SW:** Well it's only what I've said talking about earlier, having to write an album that I could probably gig with or tour with. So I have an excellent idea for a starting point for an album like that, as far as the concept goes. And I just have to find a way to do it with about five people. So that I can get it out, manageable, on the road. So we'll see what happens - I'll probably wind up with a 200 piece orchestra again. [laughs]

**RY:** And I was wondering, are you still comfortable with the identity of Scott Walker - it was created in a long ago part of your past, I'm curious to how that feels..

**SW:** I toyed with idea round my fourth album, getting rid of it. Putting only songs in the name Engel.. but after a while I started to think, during that hiatus I had, you know, where I became the great leper, that that wasn't the thing that would stop people or start them buying records. I don't think when people hear my name now they associate it so much with that as with this new stuff, which is.. either more horrifying to them or not, I don't know. But you know, I don't think it's going to make any difference now. It would just confuse issues even more, and it's hard enough.

**RY:** but in terms of your own identity? Doesn't feel like a dead weight?

**SW:** No, I never think about it. Probably, like the English singer, I've become it. It's attached to me - a permanent appendage.

**RY:** About the documentary - how much involvement you've had.

**SW:** I haven't had a lot. Because that's gonna be as much a surprise to me as anyone. I've done an interview for it - we've spent more than half the time here today, you and I, than I did for that. They were at the studio a couple of times when we were tracking some things, but not for any of the major antics. And somehow, this guy's going to put something together, and I'm just as interested as you are - if you are!

**RY:** As far as I can tell he's getting a lot of archive together, is there a discomfort with you celebrated as an 'iconic' artist?

**SW:** I simply don't know what it is. The main reason I agreed to do it was because, for the kind of thing I do now, it's very difficult to get any outlet to promote it, basically. There are Culture Shows and things like that, but there's no other thing. (I was invited on Radio 1, but that's another story)

So my manager, after much much [persuasion], over a couple of years, said, Let him do it, you'll have final approval, if you don't like it you can pull the whole thing. That's the only way I can look at it. If it's too much, you know, if someone rubbishes me too much I'll pull it! [laughs]

**RY:** You give a credit to Fuckhead..

**SW:** I love them... how did I hear them? I think I heard them on a radio show one night. And when I went out and got the record, I loved it even more. And I'm using a noise, I sampled a noise for Jolson + Jones, the sound going 't-t-t-t-t', that's why I gave them the credit.

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