



Sven Schumann and Johannes Bonke, photographed by Alex De Brabant in Berlin.
Suits by KOSTAS MURKUDIS.

The Talks —

“Mr. Nicholson, do you ever think about dying?”

Sven Schumann and Johannes Bonke have been working together for fifteen years - in this time, they recall, they have never been out of contact for longer than a week. The pair, by their own admission, know everything about each other, though in the forum of their online interview magazine, *The Talks*, they are rarely short of questions, and rarely shy of delivering them bluntly: an interview with Jack Nicholson, for instance, begins with the question *“Mr. Nicholson, do you ever think about dying?”*

It's a bold, brash question to ask of a man of seventy, verging on tasteless, and yet Nicholson answers with gusto (he wants, he clarifies, *“a big, 25-foot pink statue that holds my grave”*), the interview buoyed by an irreverent style, and a faint disdain for the hierarchy between interviewer and interviewee. Tellingly, in one email they refer to their interview subject as an *“opponent”*, as though to be interviewed for *The Talks* is to take part in a sparring match; *“Mr Gondry,”* they ask the film director Michel Gondry, as an opener, *“why are you still making commercials?”*

The Nicholson interview was conducted because the actor's ‘people’ approached Sven and Johannes, rather than the other way around - it was, Sven says, *“not something which was done for The Talks. I always wanted to talk to Jack Nicholson, of course! But it wasn't that I chased it”*. As a rule, *The Talks* is split between interviews which Sven and Johannes have worked hard to arrange - subjects like Tom Ford, for instance, whose interview was featured on the blogs of *Vogue* and the *New York Times*, along with every fashion blog going - and those which fall into the duo's collective lap, such as Nicholson. The designers, they insist, are

worth pursuing because “if you get to their apartment, they’ll show you around their offices. It’s not like a Hollywood star, where you get thirty minutes, and that’s it”.

More recently than Ford’s, however, another interview by *The Talks* has been working its way around the so-called blogosphere: a discussion with photographer Scott Schumann of *The Sartorialist*, which was published on September 28th, in which he trumpets his own wealth and integrity at length (“*my audience is so much larger than everybody’s*”).

“It surprised me how much of a stir it made,” Sven says, carefully. “I knew that when he was talking about how much money he makes, for instance, and things like that, that these things would be easy to quote.” *The Talks*, the two are quick to clarify, has no interest in courting controversy, though for the record, they are very happy with the interview – it’s honest, after all, where most interviews with known subjects are conducted, Sven believes, “in a voyeuristic and an exploitative sort of way”.

“I think it’s easier to talk to people that are not actors, actually,” he concludes, “because they are not quite as worried about their image. What you realise from the conversations that you have with them is that a lot of questions where they could give answers in a great way, they block out. Artists don’t have to be as careful with their public image.” Sven and Johannes bring out the best in their celebrity cohorts, simply by being human and honest: after a fifteen year partnership, it’s clear that they bring out the best in each other, as well. — Words by Philippa Snow

