

# B Side

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portrait of a contradiction

## NINE INCH NAILS

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WHIGS

the  
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JAMES  
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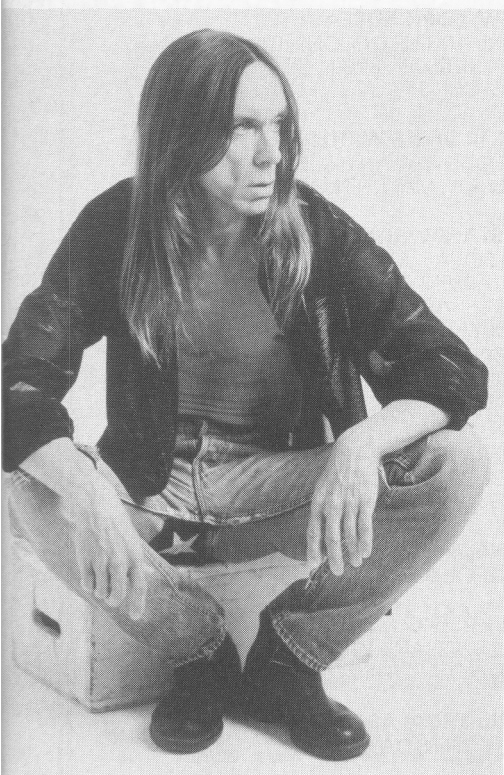


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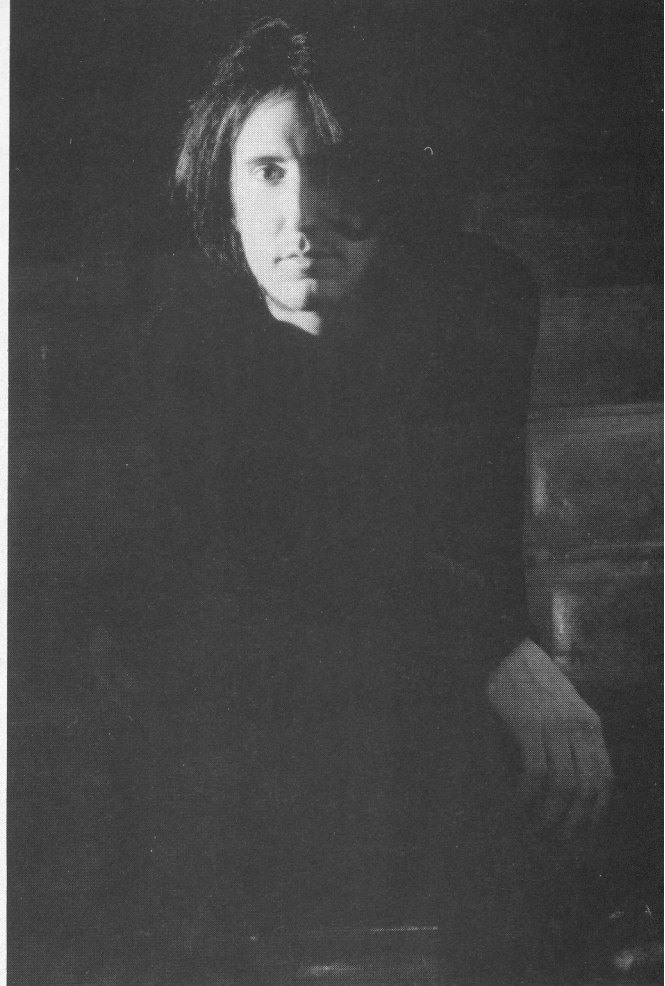


PHOTO BY SANDRA C. DAVIS

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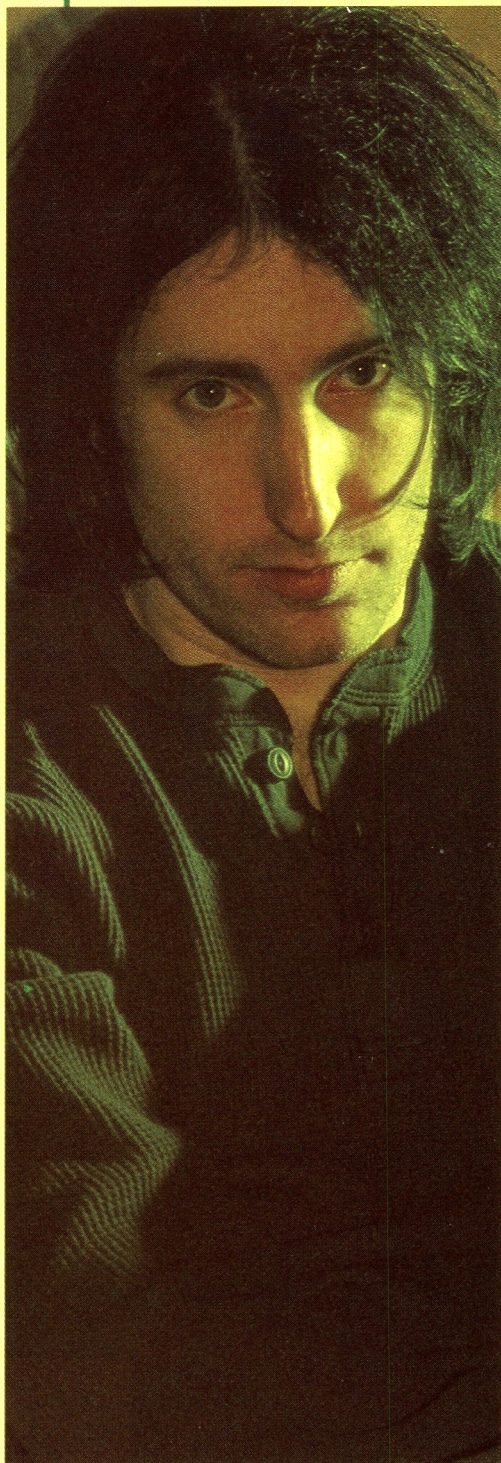


PHOTO OF JAMES BY MICHELE TAYLOR



Chris Vrenna enters a bakery. "I need a cherry pie for Trent."  
"We're out of cherry pies, Chris."

Chris looks totally distraught, declaring, "This can't be. Trent *really* wants that cherry pie..."



When your photographer has a dream like this a week before an interview, you laugh. But when you just happen to see a cherry pie in a bakery window hours before that interview, you buy it.

Even though Trent's laughing he's still looking at us with an expression that says 'what asylum do I call to get these two taken away?' I'm glad he's laughing: I have orders from someone who knows him to push the pie in his face if he doesn't.

So why are we threatening Trent with a cherry pie? Oh my God, could it be due to the release of a *new* album? Good answer!

Let's take a few giant steps back. This Trent Reznor tale has been mutating since mid-1992... starting with that over-publicized occupation of the Sharon Tate house. Trent bitterly mocks, "I can't say I moved into

TEXT ► SANDRA A. GARCIA

PHOTOS ► SANDRA C. DAVIS

the Sharon Tate house to do a record because it was a *cool* place. When I found out that it was that place it didn't even dawn on me that I would get such shit for it. It was like wow, the chance to live in a cool house that's ten times nicer than any place I've ever lived. Hell, yeah, I'll try it until they kick me out. But that has been misconstrued into everything I do is an attempt to get publicity."

Just another facet of Trent's tempestuous career that went awry for no good reason... Trent still doesn't accept how newsworthy he really is. Once *Hard Copy* knows about you, you're doomed.

We all know about that deliciously evil gem called *Broken*. But it wasn't where Trent was going. It was a nasty musical temper tantrum, a knee-jerk reaction to his fouled-up career. The mainstream press tried to play catch up on Trent when *Broken* reared its vicious little head. No one questioned what was going to happen when Trent finally focused with his true musical talent instead of his hatred. Almost no one...

As much as I trust Trent's vision it worried me that no new music was



# TRENT REZNOR



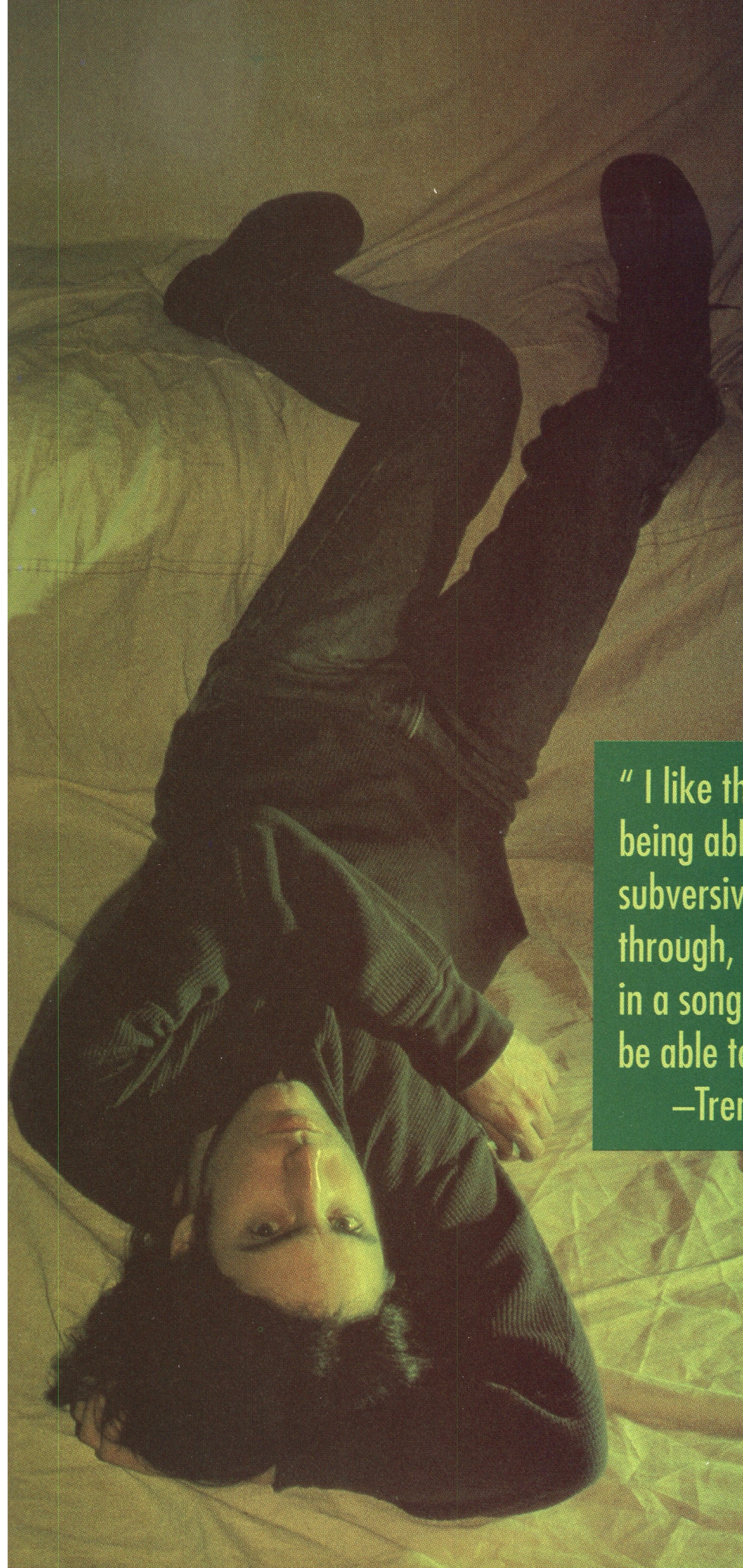
PORTRAIT

OF

A

CONTRADICTION





"I like the idea of being able to get a subversive message through, dressed up in a song you might be able to hum."

—Trent Reznor

going to be heard until I am in LA...

After a wonderful visit to Death Valley, which seemed an appropriate prelude to Trent's trauma, once back in LA we get strong armed into going to proudly pretentious Smal-l's. Help me! Since the friend who begged us to come is busy swapping gossip with fellow musicians and I have the car keys, which in LA is power, I'm considering going into bitch mode and stalking out.

"Oh my God... you'll never guess who is sitting across the room.."

"Who..."

"Trent..."

Perfect. I'll be damned if I am looking over there let alone cross the room. I enjoy a sense of empowerment too. After five minutes I hear a "Hello ladies...." Just perfect.

Next evening at a rented house on Hollywood Boulevard where it twists into the Hills (Trent, of course, mocks this address) I'm handed a cassette tape with a lifetime of nerves attached to it. "Be gentle with me..."

"Is there a reason to have to be?" I ask as Masie, Trent's playful Golden Labrador, keeps offering me her leash.

"It's not done yet... I've another week in the studio...there's no singles on it...." Trent's emitting waves of defensiveness mixed with both subtle defiance and anxiety. Now I really want to hear this. We'll be back tomorrow afternoon.

The verdict? I don't care how long Trent's been in LA, and I don't care what you might-

think of him, he's masterfully built the bitter bridge between *Pretty Hate Machine* and *Broken*.

With *The Downward Spiral* Trent has created an amazingly ambiguous and anxious album that alternately slashes its nails across the sonic blackboard then stares hollowly into that dark void only to flail into even harder cathartic convulsions. He's finally found a true musical voice through exploring haunting new directions of sound. And he'll shake off casual fans like Masie shakes her pull toy. Just perfect.

It's fitting that the next day turns out to be relentlessly grey and torrentially rainy. Up in the Hills the rain gushes like blood from a torn artery on its way down to flood Sunset. "I realize I still get more done when it's raining outside. I still have this built-in 'oh, it's a beautiful day outside, I should be doing something outside...'" Trent jests.

I knew it. That's why the album took so long. You were out being a surfer dude... I can tell by that incredibly healthy pallor. "I gave up. When I was a kid I was Casper, always the whitest kid on the block. But I said 'you know what? Someday that's going to come into style... and you are going to pay.' Skinny pale kids... you wait until you are a wrinkled prune... although I'll probably be dead from



some other cause by that time. But my skin will look good. Plus I feel like a freak now because I don't have some sort of tattoo. Unusual," Trent mocks as he offers his bare arms in evidence.

It's obvious being trapped in LA for months hasn't changed Trent's mockingly dry edge. "Believe me, this has done nothing but increase my isolation," he laughs. "We've been totally uprooted. But I discovered if you just keep working you don't have time to miss your life," he grins. "I enjoy working, but at the same time, there will probably be four double albums out..."

At least you'll be able to get back to touring new material soon... "Yeah, that will be fun for six months then I'll be like I can't wait to get into the studio," he mock whines. "I need something to keep miserable with all the time."

That's Trent has that happy reputation as a miserable bastard. He looks at me with this incredulous grin. I may get that pie in my face. Hey, the British press practically nominated him as the tortured soul poster boy of the decade. He rapidly scoffs, "Sometimes it's just really fun to play up, especially with those idiots. It's not about music, it's about the soap opera, give them the show."

Needless to say, Trent's found his tenure in LA to be less than cheerful. That we saw him at Small's was amazing, considering it's only the fourth time he's been coaxed there. His summation of LA? "It's like 'so, what do you do? What do you drive?'" as Trent gives a nasty smile, innocently declaring "'Why, my fist up your ass.'"

Nope, he hasn't changed a bit.

## PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A SLAVE

As Masie happily sprawls between us on Trent's couch, Trent begins an steady outpouring of the events that have occupied his life in the last four years, apologizing since I already know most of this. He wants it for the record. "We toured for eternity, and the bottom fell out, and what was really shitty about all that was... say up to where Lollapalooza happened, as the popularity of the band increased, and got outside of the realm of the people I could understand liking it, some of our original fans started thinking, 'OK, the same record I liked a year ago, now I hate it because my sister likes it.' You can't stop people from liking it!"

During all this the relationship with Trent's label TVT deteriorated so badly that he realized he could never create another album for them. *Pretty Hate Machine* was nudging the million mark, and even though Trent swears that TVT hated everything about the album when he delivered it to them, they certainly weren't hating what eventually happened on the financial end. Trent was reaping the glory of public acceptance, but little else.

"It got to the point where it was so unproductive that it wasn't a matter of me demanding this and that, it was a matter of me going just let me do what I want." The relationship became so perverse that Trent had to play games such as asking for a video director he really didn't want since he knew he would be refused who he really wanted. "It was unproductive, and it was like that on every level. After the record started selling on its own terms we thought they would think maybe these guys know what they're doing, why don't we just leave them alone? No. Oh, this record sold a million? Let's have the next record sell five million."

Unfortunately, by this time Trent had discovered yet another unpleasant aspect of the music biz. "It's basically set up so that if you're the artist, you're screwed. We went to a lawyer and said 'look, we've got 20 instances of where they've wronged us. We've never gotten a penny.' At the time we had sold 800,000 records and I had never seen a cent. I was 'what is going on?'" The legal hassles that Trent went through were immense, basically boiling down to no matter what, he was going to lose a lot of money and still not be able to get out of his contract.

And Trent's not asking for sympathy. He freely admits he screwed up but he still can't accept a system that is allowed to rape an artist's natural resources. Example: TVT owns the publishing rights to the first album. "We didn't know any better... that was a monumental..." as he pauses in fury, mouth pinching bitterly. "We gave them administrative rights, which means when someone calls me and goes 'hey, I was watching this terrible movie last night with Corey Feldman in it and 'Head Like a Hole' was in it.' 'You're kidding me!' So I find the movie and sure enough, there it is. They

got five grand to put that in the movie. 'Hey Trent, I was watching this shitty movie...' 'Oh no, not again! No, Noooooo!'" he mockingly groans, shaking his head in despair. "It became a thing where I realized that I'd rather see Nine Inch Nails evaporate and die then where what it was going to turn into: if it had to be the end, that was the end. Litigation was going to take two years, this was already two years after the record was out, which would be certain death. Then it was going to cost somewhere between half a million and three quarters of a million. And that's not saying you're going to get off. Because there was no smoking gun, in bullshit lawyer-speak, which has to be some horrible act." The following gem about a label head and semen is best left alone.

Trent sighs, "That's a pretty shitty feeling. On one hand you've worked hard and are seeing something taking off; on the other hand you're on thin ice and you know it's over and you can't do anything about it. I can't even describe that feeling, to not be in control at all. It's such an awful feeling."

"A bunch of labels were interested in buying us off TVT. TVT wouldn't let anybody take us. Legally another bigger label can't help you financially get off a smaller label, due to some small amount of ethics that exists in this business," he mocks.

"When Lollapalooza came up, I said no because I hate playing outside, big venues, and just that whole party down, all day festival bullshit. But when they came back and said we'll pay you 12,000 each show...shit! For 45 minutes!"

This sounded attractive at the time since Trent wanted to save enough money to mount a legal battle to get off of TVT. "We did the tour, we did make some money, and we were going to start our last hope." It had gotten so bitter between the label and himself that he banned them from backstage, and even had TVT mogul Steve Gottlieb thrown out for impersonating Steve Gottlieb! "Moments of greatness in the midst of the nightmare," Trent grins. "But then Interscope entered into the picture in the form of doing some joint venture deal with TVT, which at the time, my impression of Interscope was this is a label known for Marky Mark and Geraldo... it's TVT with more money! I've been enslaved to someone else! But after quite a bit of head butting we agreed to go with that. It was good for us because it involved no litigation, I wouldn't have to stop my career for x amount of years, and to be quite fair, we had to work it so that TVT is financially in the picture, but I don't have to deal with them. Meanwhile, Interscope has turned out to be totally great: they're nice," he declares with exaggerated shock, "and they let us do what we have to do. They give me a chunk of money and I give them a record. They respect me. That's turned out to be pretty pleasant." Things are looking up...maybe.

## I HATE EVERYONE

Now we're up to mid- 1992. *Broken* spewed forth in its glorious apocalypse of hate. Radio stations who wouldn't normally have the balls to touch something that virulent sat back and watched 'Happiness in Slavery' get voted screamer of the week by fans rabid for something new from NIN. "*Broken* was right after Lollapalooza, when we couldn't record, we couldn't do anything because TVT would own it. So I just wanted to make this angry little blob of music, which we did under different band names in studios so TVT wouldn't know what we were doing. When the deal came though with Interscope I said here's this. It was an EP because I didn't want it any longer. It was just a blast of anger."

"After that we went to Europe for the first time and for the most part sucked. We opened for Guns and Roses on a couple of dates which totally sucked. A failed experiment. I'm glad we did it to say we did it but I never want to get back on stage like that again."

"I was going through this mental breakdown, and it became very unpleasant. It became that feeling of I've devoted my whole life to this and I can't do it anymore."

A small respite was found in *Fixed*. Trent liked the idea hearing what remixes of *Broken's* material would sound like through the ears of musicians like Peter Christopherson (Coil), Jim Thirlwell and Adrian Sherwood. But after only 50% of the remixes turned out to be usable, (like Peter's and Jim's: Adrian Sherwood's and producer Butch Vig's were disasters) he filled it out with left over noise experiments, limited its pressing and let it go at the price of a



12" single. He confesses, "Honestly, what it came down to was what I thought could have been a great idea in its execution started to suck."

So Trent now has his budget from Interscope. It's finally time to work on that new album. But the problem was where to record it... "I wanted to get back and get new material. I thought the idea of having a studio in a house would be a good thing. So we bought some gear, and were going to set up in New Orleans where I was living and was *happy*," he strongly stresses. "But we couldn't find a house that was big enough. We needed a place apart from other people. We did find one place but it was this situation where I would have to buy the house..." as he grimaces, giving a mocking little laugh. "I'll spend that much on a mixing console, but *not* on a house. That's a frightening *adult* thing to do," he deadpans. "So the people helping us get the studio together were from LA, and the practical side is there's a million people in LA who can do that stuff. So I flew in for a day, saw a bunch of houses, one of which was that Sharon Tate house, which I didn't at the time know, because we were whirlwinding through five minutes per house. That was the coolest house. We saw fifteen [houses] that would have worked for what I was willing to pay. That one was cool because it was fairly centrally located but was on the side of a mountain with the most amazing view I had *ever* seen in my life. So... I know this is an old story but I have to justify why I ended up in the Tate house.. people are 'oh, you're sooo spooky,'" he wearily mocks. "So later someone said that the Sharon Tate house was up on the hill you were on. I was '*really?*'" Trent describes that his friend had a copy of *Helter Skelter* which he started flipping through. "There's a floor plan of the house. Turn the page... there's a picture of the ladder leading up to the loft and I clearly remembered climbing up to that loft that day. *Holy...!*" as he imitates fearfully thrusting the book away. "But at the end of the day we had decided as cool as that house was, I preferred New Orleans because it would be easier to work there. So we went home and the house that we were going to get had been sold. The realty people had screwed us. So I said we're going to LA, get the Tate house.

"We drove out there the next month, and had re-read *Helter Skelter* to re-familiarize ourselves with it. We got there at night, and it was terrifying ... I was '*what have we done?*' It seemed easy to make the decision when we were miles away but *now*... But after a week we didn't think about it because it was serene... a peaceful place. If there's any *vibe* there it's more one of sadness than of intense fear. It's not like a haunted house," he shrugs.

So Trent's in the Tate house. The music press has him for dinner. But so what; everything's going to be perfect with an in-house studio to record anytime you want and... wait a minute. This is Trent Reznor we're talking about. "Then the new delays begin. We want to set a studio up. I'm estimating a month to set it up. It takes three months because of *every* imaginable problem you can dream of. Part of the incentive to set up a studio was to force myself to learn more engineering, so I would be less dependent."

But it's not as simple as that. Trent pantomimes an elaborate mock drama of what happens when you go to record ideas and nothing works, concluding, "You end up on your back looking at all these cables... ok, forget *writing* songs, let's take time to figure this out. You start to see the negative side in having the studio in the house... So months go by, and you've got the room sounding good, you've got the gear working, everything's cool, the *vibe*'s right... now I have to write a song. 'OK... all right... I am going to write a song *now*. OK. *Right*...' Hand-wringing despair best sums up his next pantomime. He's good at this. "I knew what I wanted to do thematically on this record, but sound wise... with *Broken* I knew what I wanted to do. With this record I was very conscious of the fact that I *didn't* want to go in there and make another record that sounded like *Broken*. And when I started writing for this record I would pick up a guitar, write things and they would sound like *Broken* songs. So I went back to keyboards because I'm better with them, and more depth comes through harmonically.

"When I started noodling around, I'd come up with ideas and go 'well, I like that, but it's not very pop, it could never be a single... hey, it's cool. Hey, *that's* kind of strange'... then *another* one would come out that way. When I approach doing an album, usually I

like the feeling of thinking I've got a couple of good strong songs, like when I did *Pretty Hate Machine*, 'Down In It' was one of the first songs I had done, which I thought was a good song, an anchor song that gives me room to try more experimental stuff, knowing there is some amount of focus. And if that is writing pop songs, then that's what I do. Like 'Head Like A Hole' came at the end, and I realized that it's an obvious song, but it sets you up to sit through another song. On this record, I didn't feel that I had *any* of those. So about six songs into it Flood got involved. And I said 'I've got a record of b-sides that I like, but I don't think there's anything for a focus cut.' Well, let's just go on and at some point I'll come up for air and say, 'this sucks,' or... I didn't know. It gave me an underlying questioning of the whole thing.

"I think *Broken* was a real safe record, although it wasn't as commercial as *Pretty Hate Machine*," he mocks. "I knew I was on the fence in a lot of people's minds... was I going to be a pussy or was I going to be a man? Do hard *male* rock... and I did. And I don't regret doing that, and that's certainly how I felt at the time. It's not that I don't want to do that, but I consciously tried on this record to do some different things.

"I didn't want to establish Nine Inch Nails as something where every song has to be harder and faster than the last one. Because I don't think that equals *more* intense. I have seen a lot of bands that are like 'we are the *hardest, toughest, meanest* bastards in the world,' and after five songs of that, that *doesn't* equal being intense. There's a different type of emotion, of intensity that sets you up differently. I was more concerned with that. When I sit down with an instrument, not everything that comes out is super hard, a metal song.

"I had a lot of people who came from seeing us live [at Lollapalooza], people had just heard of us. They'd be," Trent now accurately adopting a metal dude, "'you're *great*, but I bought your record and it *sucks*, maaan! It's all like keyboards and *shit*.'"

Another annoyed shrug follows as Trent declares, "Well, OK, then we *suck*! I thought they *complimented* each other... I still think it's a good record. But live it mutated into something else.

"It also took a long time to do this record because initially I didn't know if I had anything to *say*," he confesses with total vulnerability. "It wasn't as distinct a voice as *Broken*. What I had to say was less obvious, and less shouting in your face. I tried to reinvent... I don't know how successful I've been. I tried to do things I've never done before. Different structures: not all verse, chorus, bridge, verse... I think every song I've written before this has the same structure. I tried to break that up."

There's sonic structures on *Downward Spiral* that are more distinct than anything Trent's ever offered. Some of the structures are so aurally disturbing, like the mutantly twisted title track, that you can hear he's finally connected with his own unique language of sound. And there's a specific reason for this.

"I've listened to a lot more older stuff, like old Bowie, old Iggy Pop, Lou Reed: stuff that I really hadn't heard before as I was so into Kiss that I ignored it. I think the discovery of hearing records like *Low* and *Transformer* ..." as he pauses, stressing, "I *hate* the idea of retro. I *hate* the idea of people like Lenny Kravitz or Pearl Jam. They aren't doing anything new in any stretch of the imagination. So when I contradict myself by saying one of the biggest influences of the last year has been old stuff, it's the revelation of... this is my theory." There's that self-mocking voice! "When you hear a record like *Low*, someone asks me 'hey, what new albums do you have,' and I have to think for 30 seconds before I can even *remember* the last record I bought of a new band that I thought was really good, more than just a song on a record. It seems that the music industry is so much more product oriented now, it's so..."

Extremely lazy regarding signing anything creative.

"Mmmmm... maybe lazy on the part of the musicians, where all you really need to do is be pretty, have one song, have a flashy video and you're a star. Most people now when they buy a CD, there's maybe two good songs on there. Is that worth it? Then some of these older records, you hear them and *every* song... you think I couldn't even write *one* song that good, let alone ten! And trying to put it into the perspective of what was happening at that time, and you think Jesus Christ! It was so much more art oriented



then this unit moving video shit. I aspired to make a record that was more like that... now that could also be the excuse for having a record with no singles on it," he softly remarks, vigorously massaging Masie's ears.

So is there a problem with that, Trent? You've made an intrinsically solid album: an entire listening experience. Do you need those obvious singles? "I don't think you do but in light of how things are now..." as he sips his iced tea. "I am lying if I say I don't do this... when I am writing a song, I do erase things from my mind in terms of marketing and bullshit business. But there comes a point, especially when it's done in the studio, where you think 'OK, now, I am not going to pretend that oh I am just an artist, I don't care what happens...' I care *very* much *what* happens, and how I am going to be presented to the people, and how my band is viewed. I am *aware* of that. When I look at it that way, and I say 'OK, what's my goal in putting this record out? Well, I would hope that it would get through to the people who would like it. So, what's the best way to go about that? What song would I want to make a video of?' I do think of those things, and I am not ashamed to admit that. I want to know how the business end of it works..."

If I heard anything less from you after what was done to your career I would think you were a moron who's out of touch with reality. "You realize the more knowledge you have of how things work, the more empowered you are over control of your own things. So... I don't really know what to expect from this one. I like it... if I *didn't* like it, I wouldn't have given you the tape."

I felt like I was pushing something by expecting this talk to happen when we planned. That's why I became leery of what I was going to hear. "I was apprehensive... it basically is done aside from a few minor things that I'm just dragging my feet to do. It's hard to be in the studio everyday for six months and then turn around and say, 'OK, now I am going to pretend I've never heard this before, let's get the order together.' I hear a song and remember punching a wall because I couldn't get it right, or of hating a certain person because they fucked it up... so I'll feel better when I think the order is right. I do think it might be a grower type of record that people will need to hear a few times." But that's just perfect...

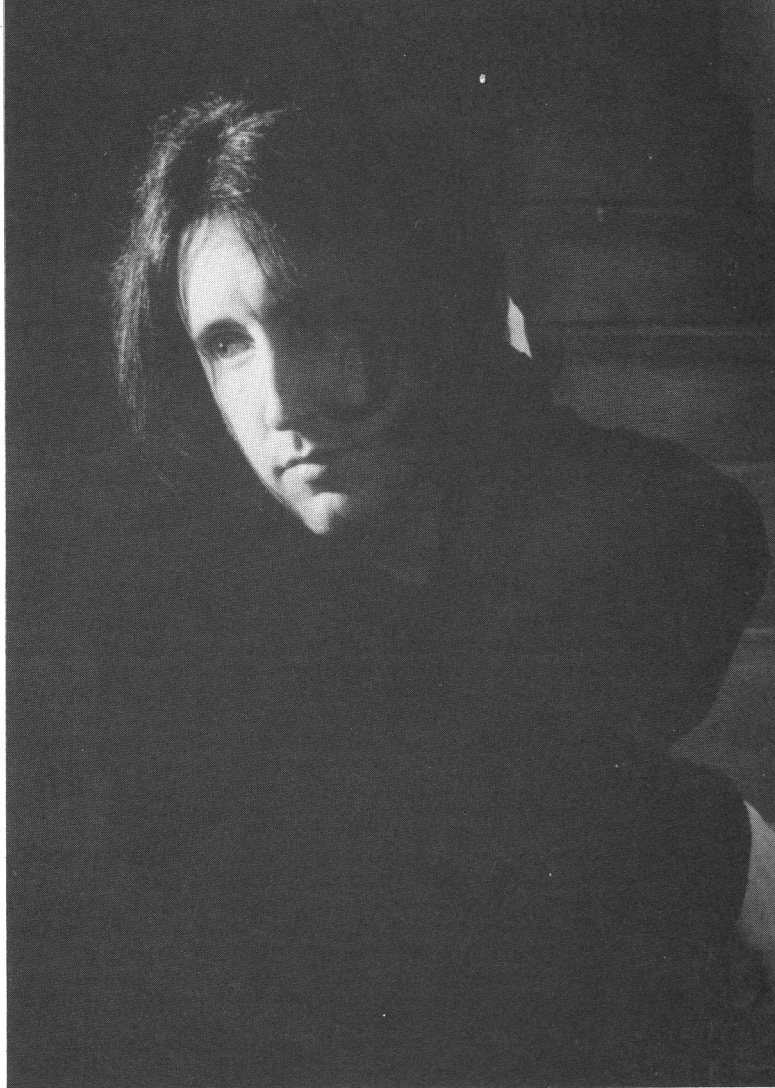
## SAVE ME FROM MYSELF

Trent is truly into the confessional route this rainy day. He may be known as being critical, but he's always harshest on himself. After berating himself again for screwing up career-wise, he despairs, "I'm just not wanting to write. I do not enjoy the process that much. I like it when it's done, I can think that's good, that's getting the feeling."

"But before it things are good, I'm having fun, I'm going around the world... oh, I don't want to hide in a room and be a *loser* and lose all my friends which I've done again. The friend count is down to less than one hand... it *sucks* the life I lead," he mutters. Masie gazes up at him adoringly as he continues to stroke her ears. Hey, Masie still loves you. This earns me a thrilled look which darkens as he sighs, letting his head drop back.

If it makes you feel any better, *Downward Spiral* succeeds in furthering the Nine Inch Nails emotional range. The album alternates between highly charged aggression and an overwhelming despair. The one instrumental offering, 'A Warm Place,' is chilling despite its title. Moody, haunting, angry... with lashing lyrics that sound like they were penned by a tortured psychopath when read on their own. Whoops, I get another darkly arch look thrown my way. Sorry, that's the truth. Those lyrics are hardly the things dreams are made of... more like nightmares. Trent, you did print them out for me to read, didn't you?

"I know. I was trying to concentrate on a few things that I thought were somewhat weak in the past, which was mood in particular. There are a lot more instrumental moments on this. And I've always tried to look at the main focus as the lyrics, then the music seemed to come easy. I wasn't as afraid of doing that... the way I approached this record was with the goal to make an *album*, which is an unfashionable thing to do. I wanted to have this flow to it. When I sat down to write these songs I almost had a story written out. What I am trying to do now is to see what moods I did not explore fully. That's what I am trying to fix."



Happiness isn't fully explored on this one... what a surprise! But there is a different plan of attack for the next album. "The idea of doing the record next year is to write it while touring. Just to keep busy, and to approach it in a different way."

"I also have a new band together now which is far superior to what I had in the past. It's a new five piece, which is going to be pretty hard to pull off. The stuff on *Broken* and this new stuff has never been played live before. But I've now got guys who want to do it and are excited to do it. That's half the battle: the attitude and the excitement. It's tough to go out forever and... blah, blah, blah," as he suddenly mocks himself anew for his long answers.

Gee, another shocker: the new band members aren't from L.A. What a surprise! Seriously, though, that's always been the skewed quality to Nine Inch Nails: it has never been a band in the studio. Trent creates the music then has to explain to musicians how it should work. Trent quickly declares, "A comment on that. We'd never been into the context of 'hey, let's go into the studio and make a record.' But with this record, especially with the lack of distinct musical identity; 'OK, I want to open up the palate to something new. How do I do that? I'll involve my *band*! Hey, they've been wanting to do that.' When I opened that door up, which essentially amounted to Rich, the interest level was there."

Or was it? Trent frowns, "It's one thing to talk a big shitstorm about I want to be in your band. Ok, now I need help, so let's do it. I've got a new keyboard player that I was working with for a while. And both of them were working on their own little projects, and then it became a competition of 'oh, I have to out do Trent.' Then it got to be what am I doing? Everyone in my band: I am now the last priority. It was insane," he sighs. "I am all for people expressing themselves. If you are the guitar player in my band and you're also a great jazz saxophonist, then get a band together and do it. You're not going to be doing it in Nine Inch Nails. I provide the framework for what I think the album (Continued on page 62)

PHOTO BY SANDRA C. DAVIS



## NINE INCH NAILS

(Continued from page 49)

should be like, now let's flesh it out into an album. If you have songs, even lyrics, fine. But when I tried that, that's when the overhaul came in again. I realized I just have to do it myself. Every time I try to branch out, I realize I just should have done it myself in the first place. It's not that I don't think anyone else can do it, but..." as another shrug ends his thought.

"I feel a lot better now that ideas did start coming. It wasn't really a situation of writer's block. I don't sit down and just go, 'OK, I want to write a song. I think I'll write a fast one; what do I want to write about today?' Something has to *tell* me write a song about this because it is screwing you up. Then a song springs out. But I am not going to write a song about not being able to get my tape deck to arm, or how much I hate LA. No. That's *too easy*," he dismisses. "But this has been an isolating experience being here, not knowing the city, not fitting in, not trying that *hard* to fit in, because I *don't* want to be Anthony Kiedis. I have no desire to subscribe that LA lifestyle. It's funny but the joke wears thin after a while."

Trent knows there's this inherent mistrust of everything he does: that has to put an incredible amount of pressure on him, especially since this album has taken so long. I'm surprised vicious rumors aren't flying about him being a helpless junkie locked up in some dark room. "I have been under an incredible amount of pressure ever since Lollapalooza," he corrects, "the pressure being mostly from myself. I am trying to make a record that's true to how I feel about things. I'm doing it for myself, but at the same time I hope there's a certain amount of connection. But it's certainly not the record for everybody. But I also realize once you set yourself up: it's not just making music, or hopefully getting paid to make music, you're also set up as an icon. Some people like you, and some people want to rip you apart any way they can. I don't know if the fact that it's more electronic based draws attention to that..."

Especially since so many bands have distanced themselves from being etched with that electronic edge. Even bands who were originally wedded to the idea seem inclined to let their publicity department divorce them from it. Hey kids, there's more great guitars now! It's safe for commercial consumer consumption! I thought something more would evolve at first but it... "It just stopped!" exclaims Trent in conclusion. "All the bands just changed! I mean... I was thinking about the heyday of Wax Trax. A few years ago, I looked forward to *everything* that came out on that label. And most of it was at least interesting if not good. And it seems like everyone either turned more into a metal band or a techno band, which I cannot stand personally, techno, that is: it irritates me. It's part of that bullshit club scene that I don't understand and am not a part of in any capacity."

If I start an argument about this we'll be here past my flight time.

### SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL

Besides, there's something more...*pressing* to deal with. Trent suddenly intones, "There's something I'd like to clear up. We have made plenty of screw-ups in terms of making decisions: you execute them and realize that was stupid. Why did we do that? For example: *Spin*."

An involuntary "Oh no!" squeaks out of me. I *knew* he'd bring that up, especially since I interviewed Front Line Assembly's Bill Leeb right after that awful article, and Bill was scathing in his comments about Trent's trashing of Front Line Assembly. Masie, want to go for a walk in the rain?

But Trent's not hostile in the least, bless him. If anything, that *Spin* disaster still deeply upsets him. "Now just for the record let me say this. When *Spin* approached us about doing a cover, it was because it was right after Lollapalooza, and *Spin* realized that they hadn't done anything on this guy and he's gotten pretty big. So *Spin* calls up."

Trent begins a long conversational reenactment. "Hey, we want to do a cover and all that blah, blah, blah..." I go 'no. We've done enough.' 'Oh, we *really* want to do a cover, *really*...' 'No. I *don't* have any record coming out soon, I *don't* have anything to talk about, I *don't* want to talk about Lollapalooza, I *don't* want to talk about FBI video bullshit, I *don't* want to talk about Axl Rose liking the band: so *what*. No, no, no.' 'But we *really* feel we need the cover to catch up on what's happened with your band.' 'This is about the time when I turn on the TV and I see 'Head Like A Hole,' which is now in Buzz Bin, a year and a half after it was turned down originally...' 'Oh to have the look that follows that one as a weapon...' 'Look, we *really* want to do a cover and what we want to do it about is how you guys have made it without MTV, for the most part, without radio, without big corporate magazines like us. We want to talk about how you did it and your whole approach.' 'Oh. Really?'

"I'm thinking OK, we're not going to be in the public eye for quite some time, at least until there's a record... maybe I should do this. 'Oh, if it's about that...' and there's a bit of ego involved there too," he freely admits. "It'd be nice to be acknowledged by those people. I don't mean *Spin* as much as their middle America mainstream audience." Of course...what better revenge then to have that cretinous jock who dissed you in high school see you on the cover of *Spin*... "OK, we'll do it."

"The guy shows up, in New Orleans: 'so, industrial music: what do you think the future of it's going to be?'

"What!?!?"

"OK, so you guys are an *industrial* band. What exactly is that?"

"WHAT??"

"Look, is this going to be the new heavy metal? I am panicking. Shit! 'Well, ummm, *errr*,' and I am thinking this guy doesn't know *anything* about what he's talking about. I am in an interview and I want to *hit* this guy but I *can't*," he snarls. "So I started trying to talk but I am panicked. 'You want a beer?' 'Yes, I want a beer. Yes, I would like five more beers.' I am trying to steer him back on track and he keeps coming back to industrial music, like he had just heard that term for the first time at Lollapalooza. And that's what prompted that infamous Front Line Assembly comment. He just kept on me about industrial music until I said 'I don't even like what you don't even know would be considered today's more...' and I said that thing about Front Line. And I realize as I said it that I don't even have any real animosity: I don't even *know* those guys. I don't like their music and I would tell that to their faces. But I don't *know* the people. I can like somebody as a person but not like their art. So that's basically what I said."

"I left that interview and called John (Malm, Trent's steadfast manager) and said 'this is a *disaster*, this is the *worst* that it could possibly be.' So the thing comes out and *arrggghhh*," as he plants his slender hands over his face, raking his fingers up into his dark tangle of hair. "*Arrrghh*, all right, I did this to myself because I said I would do it. Industrial music, blah, blah, blah... *arrggghhh*!! So now that's in big print, and it's a big disaster. I write a letter to Bill Leeb to say I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say it, *hate* me, I'm sorry. So the shitstorm begins, and that's when I became a complete recluse rather than just a partial one," he concludes.

"And the point of me bringing that whole thing up is I acknowledge making mistakes with the media. With us, there's a specific situation where over the last couple of years the alternative has become the mainstream, quite obviously; when you can take a band like the Lemonheads and label them alternative, it doesn't mean *anything* anymore. If Skid Row came out with their first album today I am sure their whole marketing team would term them alternative and they would have flannel clothes on. Who are the biggest bands: Nirvana? Pearl Jam? Smashing Pumpkins? Well, they deserve it more than Pearl Jam. It's become a thing where who is more legitimate now. 'I am alternative so I am legitimate,' versus Bon Jovi, with whatever you'd call him. When you add this to the stew of the electronic world where we came from, with the pocket of tight knit fans and the scene, of which we were influenced by... I think the fact that we got big, and I may sound egotistical, but in my opinion, when we got big, major labels said, 'hey, what's happening, let's get bands like that.' And imagine you're in an A&R department: 'Nine Inch Nails: what are these guys?' Oh, they're called industrial! Oh, who *else* is like that?"

"But nowhere ever did I *ever* say we were an industrial band. In the world of fanzines, people bitch that NIN *aren't* industrial, Neubauten *are*!" he savagely sneers in total exasperation. "OK, fine, you've heard those bands, congratulating. I like them, I listen to them; I am not claiming to aspire to be Throbbing Gristle someday. I appreciate them, I am *friends* with them, but *stop*! I am tired people go around saying I invented banging on metal therefor I should be heralded as the second coming of Christ. Get your Neubauten tattoo and leave me alone!"

"When we went to England I had this guy yelling at me going 'well, what are you?!' 'What am I?' 'Are you a electronic band using guitars, or are you an industrial band writing pop songs?' 'I don't know, I am not the one *upset* by not being able to categorize what I am doing.' 'And onstage, your shows are theatrical, what is that?' 'I don't know, man; do you like it?' 'Yeah.' 'Then shut up!'" he snaps in conclusion. "It's bizarre! I try to treat people decently but no matter *what* I do there is going to be someone saying something shitty."

Trent has gotten to the top of a particular hill way too quickly for some people's tastes and since he's the only dark silhouette against the sky, it's open season on him. If you get a tattoo, Trent, just get a target. You've already got one imposed on your chest.

"It was awful," he sighs. "But if I had known that what was *happening*... we've become a hundred times more conscious about who we talk to. I felt *horrified*... people were like 'oh, he's an asshole.' Oh Jesus! A monumentally shitty feeling but that is what this business is all about," he groans.

"I think pulling back worked to a degree. I am not bitching, because I understand the process, but it's hard to sit down with somebody, have a conversation, and then that person gets to tell everybody their impression of what was said, and if somebody didn't like you for some reason..." he frowns. "You sit down with them, and maybe their girlfriend likes your band and that makes them uncomfortable," he sneers. "So the whole time they're on you. And that enters into a question of journalism integrity. Are you writing because you want to see yourself write? The guy who interviewed me for *Spin* is a classic example of that. Just talks about himself. 'Hey, I took a shit today and there were peanuts in it,'" he laughs. "Or are you trying to give people information about music and a band?"

"So when you do read that thing that you *supposedly* said in the context that you *supposedly* said it in, what are you *supposed* to do? Write a letter? I didn't say *that*!" he whines. "Then you just look like a big baby."



And that means that you *must* have said that something!  
"Exactly," he laughs.

## POP IS A FOUR LETTER WORD

"But the thing that I feel good about is I have never done anything that I never wanted to do. I have done things that have fucked up, which I think over the scope of time will be erased, verses putting out a shitty album that charted because of a single. I have *never* done that. And if my music is too pop for your tastes, then don't listen to it! But I am not doing it so I can..." as he moodily shrugs.

There's an important little area that Trent obviously understands, and that's the ability to construct a solid song structure. That's a virtue, not a crime: most writers never grasp that vital talent. Then Trent takes it an extra step by elegantly imposing that pop structure into electronic music without making it smarmy...there's the hybrid that attracts listeners. Trent nods, murmuring, "Let's take Coil for example. If not my favorite band, then one of my favorite bands. I really think they're awesome in terms of mood, sound sculpture, the whole deal. But I, myself, like working in the context of working within certain degrees of accessibility. I don't mean commercially, but I like the idea of being able to get a subversive message through dressed up in a song you might be able to hum. I think as much as I can appreciate experimental music that disregards any sense of structure or chords, hooks, I tend to prefer a well written song, and I do aspire to do a well written song. And if I can do that within the context of something that's not as obvious but it can stick with you... that's the biggest challenge. The challenge it not to sit down and come up with the coolest sounds through noodling for an hour, but it's trying to have something to say and putting it in a package that makes you want to hear it *again*. Slip some message in, something you can relate to. That's all I've ever tried to do, and that's the capacity I work in. I find that more challenging then let's just make art. That's like if you understand it, cool; if you don't, you're not arty enough. And in that realm there are some people that are great; Neubauten would be one of them, but there are a lot of bands that are shit! 'Hey, we don't know what we're doing but listen to how cool we are.' With a lot of those bands, it's easy to point a finger at me. Hey, we're not even in the same realm. I am *not* trying to do that. Come on over and we'll make some noise together. I enjoy that, but at the same time I find a lot of it self-indulgent," he dismisses.

## AND NOW FOR A GOOD EVENING RUINER

Trent's been going non-stop now for a long time and I've let him. I did have some type of structure in mind but since he's providing his own so be it. And he has another topic dear to him, stating, "Which brings to mind something I want to mention. We spent three or four months working on a video compilation for *Broken*. We had a video for 'Pinion,' a video for 'Wish' and one for 'Happiness in Slavery.' The only one that anybody saw was 'Happiness in Slavery.' We were MTV stars for a week," he scoffs.

"I talked to Peter [Christopherson], who did the 'Wish' video. I said 'look, I'd like to come up with some kind of home video for sale, but I don't want it to be video, video, backstage tomfoolery....'" he laughing at that notion. Yes, tomfoolery and NIN really go together. He grins, "That typical bullshit thing. So can you think of anything that would tie these together, and I'd like to do a video for 'Gave Up,' the last song on *Broken*, which I love but I think everybody else in the world hated. We will do that live," he suddenly promises. That's fine by me.

"I said 'if you're into doing it, let me know.' So he comes back with this whopper of a treatment: basically, it's along the lines of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, where there's a lot of point of view where you're the killer. Really creepy. So someone is abducted, and forced to sit and watch what's on the TV, which are these videos, and what happens to him while he is watching them. While he is being forced to watch it, the things that he sees on the video the attackers do to this guy in varying degrees. So this fades in between all the different videos, and at the end, 'Gave Up,' which is the last track, the video is what happens to him.

"So with that said, I thought about it... I was aware of *one* thing. Murder plays a very big role in this whole thing, and here I am living in the Sharon Tate house. OK, and aren't I *spooky*," this delivered with the familiar self-mocking half smirk. "But I said just do it. So he turns up with this footage which we edited at the house. It was..." as Trent shakes his head. "I have *never* seen anything as... you'll see. It is intense. It is real-looking, because a lot of it is video, and we can get away with more effects because the quality is supposed to be shitty. *Intense*. So we're both into it because it was exciting, it was something that if I heard of this I would think it was cool. But I like that kind of stuff. So then he was 'we can down play this, we can edit this down.' I said 'let's just make it the most intense thing that would make us happy. Then at the end we'll see what we have to cut out to make it palatable or even *legal*,'" he describes with an evil grin.

This sounds better than vintage Clive Barker.

"So we got done with it and we're at the online place, this high brow place and these people are like *OH MY GOD*, just *terrified* of this thing. We're looking at each other like 'this is *awesome*, but... where do we start?

Let's go back and think about this.' So I showed it to everybody in my camp, who worked for the label. One guy who works with the artists was completely offended, thought it was grotesque, *hated* it because of some of the content in it. Management said they were into it but you see it and you just don't want to go out that night. It's an evening ruiner type of thing."

Definitely not the video to put on if you're trying to impress someone on the first date. Trent bursts into laughter, gasping out a vehement "NO! You *won't* see it at anyone's party... So we thought this thing works as what it is, but let's wear the other cap. *What* can we edit out? We *can't*: it's the whole *tone* of the thing.

Trent then hypothesize, "Sooo... let's say we put this thing out, and Interscope will have a big battle, it will be on MTV news because there's this movie condoning rape and dismemberment. All right. 'Oh, Trent did 'Happiness in Slavery,' now he has to outdo himself.' This makes that look like a Disney film, by the way," he slyly interjects. Oh. He then reasons, "Every interview I do for the next five years is going to be what was your social responsibility for putting this out, which I think is none; it's a piece of art. It's a movie I funded, Peter did it, and it's interesting. Forget that it's a music video, forget that it's NIN: it's an art film."

Yeah, tell me another media fairy tale. Trent shakes his head, describing, "So we just decided to sit on it, which career-wise for Nine Inch Nails was the best thing to do, although we spent a lot of time working on it. Maybe someday it will make more sense to release it.

"I didn't want it to turn into this media grabbing stunt, which it wasn't meant to be."

They're going to accuse you of that anyway so...

"Yeah, no matter what I do, I know my intentions for doing it," he states.

Having now viewed the little brute, I can see why Trent chose to shelve it. He's absolutely right: it would just further the happy legend of Trent the notoriously spooky boy who indulges in sick imagery only for media attention. No, he's just into horror flicks: remember, he thanked horror master Clive "Hellraiser" Barker on *Pretty Hate Machine*. So let's put a real twist on it: Trent's more well-adjusted then his critics since he's getting this out of his psyche and into the light of day. In that sense, he turns out to be an incredibly honest individual. But since honesty is the scariest thing for people to face, he is a scary person. How's that for reading into someone?

I'm just glad I had some wine before viewing. I can dissociate from dismemberment and necrophilia just like every other happy pup who grew up on bad horror films, Vietnam and EC comics... but I still can't tolerate tooth yanking scenes....

## I WONDER WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS...

But first off, what about Trent's Nothing label. Originally envisioned as a shell for Nine Inch Nails but funded by Interscope, the label is already branching out and Trent has signed Pop Will Eat Itself ("There's another band that for what they do, they're really good at, but they never did shit over here. I have to blame it on the way they were handled.") and is trying to sign Coil ("Purely for the point of having domestic releases where you don't have to spend 25 bucks an album.").

Trent's favorite project, which he produced, is Florida-based Marilyn Manson. (Do I detect a theme here?) He enthuses, "I think they're really cool. They are really bizarre, but fairly accessible rock band, but as politically incorrect as anybody I've been around," he grins.

There's a realistic side to Nothing. "Also... I don't know how much longer... I mean ten years from now I don't want to be touring without no life at all, just my computer and my tour bus. There's going to come a point where... I can't do both things. I can't do it. I have tried. So at some point I would like to focus on production, which I would really like to do more of, but Nine Inch Nails eats up every second of my life."

Trent has done those famous remixes for everybody from Curve to Megadeth, but doesn't see that as real production, since you end up being more of a hired hand.

He also doesn't want to sound stupid, but he does think it cool that he can help new, innovative bands who might be screwed by major labels. He knows there are times when it's not going to work and he's going to turn out being the villain in some band's mind but aside from that he's very positive. It's good Trent still knows how to be positive.

Trent isn't as sick as everyone thinks he is. He wouldn't even pose floating face downwards in the swimming pool at his rented digs. And I always trust someone with such a gloriously affectionate pet. Trent even feeds the stray cats in that snobby, water-wasting neighborhood.

But the musical revenge continues. Trent's popular with people on weird instinctual levels: he's every high school kid's dream of making it big by lashing out at everyone and everything that made his life miserable. But at this new level he's lashing hard at inner demons and that won't sit well with casual listeners. This sounds too real, too...raw and sad. He's going to alienate a large element with *Downward Spiral*, but the legions of disenfranchised listeners will still feel its powerful underlying message.

And there's enough disenfranchised kids to make this fashionable once more. But then what are those LA clone bands going to do: stock up on black hair dye and detanning solutions? Perfect. Just perfect.