

HEALTH HAZARDS OF THE RECORDING STUDIO / HOT GUITAR SOUNDS

MUSICIAN

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ELVIS COSTELLO



**BACK WITH
THE ATTRACTIONS
OUT FOR
REVENGE**

NINE INCH NAILS

**THE OBSESSIONS
OF TRENT REZNOR**
BY VIC GARBARINI



TRENT REZNOR NAILS I T

pretty hate

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSEPH CULTICE

A person with dark hair, wearing a black leather vest, long black leather gloves, and fishnet stockings, is climbing a dark metal fence. The scene is set at night, with a blue-tinted background showing a cityscape or industrial area. The person is positioned in the center-left of the frame, leaning against the fence and looking down.

DOWN

BY VIC GARBARINI

machinery

tHE FIRST THING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NINE INCH NAILS, THE GUITAR/ SYNTH ARMY THAT BLEW MASSIVE HOLES IN THE HEADS OF AUDIENCES ON THE FIRST LOLLAPALOOZA TOUR, THE INNOVATIVE, DARKLY INTENSE CYBORGS WHOSE BROKEN EP FOUND ITS WAY ONTO CRITICS' TOP 10 LISTS LAST YEAR VIA ITS GENRE-SHATTERING SEX PISTOLS—CRASH-THROUGH—THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON CYBER-PUNK FEROCITY, IS THAT THEY DON'T REALLY EXIST.

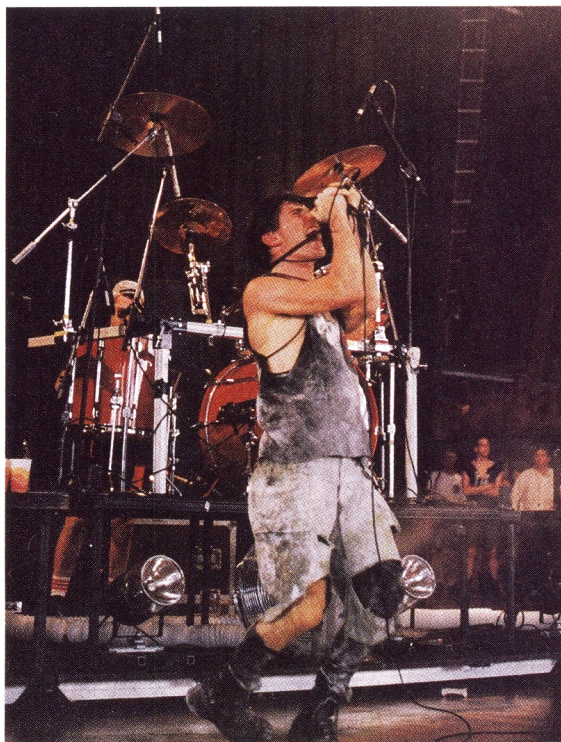
"It's a convenient fiction for me to work under, that's all," says Trent Reznor, the tech wizard pulling the strings from behind the curtain. We're talking in a dimly lit alcove in L.A. Record Plant, a gloomy Reznor biosphere where he sits, lotus-like, a veritable guru of gloom, relaxing between mixes of his ground-breaking new album, *The Downward Spiral*. Bathing in the eerie melancholy of new music by his friends Coil (who sound like congenitally depressed Tibetan monks from Neptune), Reznor runs his hands through his raven-black hair and murmurs, "I guess I have a real affinity for working with machines in certain ways. It's like they're my friends." He looks up, grinning. "I mean, I have *real* friends, too."

Oh, yeah, like Uncle Festus, and the Thing, and Cousin It...

Reznor chuckles, a rare event. "Actually a lot of people who meet me wonder where the cape and fangs are."

Thin, handsome—he could pass for Andy Garcia's little brother—Reznor has the air of a man who is bravely attempting to bear up under bad news. And he is. For Reznor, that great sucking sound you hear is God and the Universe abandoning us, drawing us into the void. On Nine Inch Nail's debut, *Pretty Hate Machine* (quasi-industrial synth pop) and the EP *Broken* (more machine-driven and more raw guitar punk), he railed against the dissolution of his inner and outer universes with a laser-like ferocity at once chilling and a bit over the top.

He is not, however, the anti-Vedder, except in the most superficial sense of being more introverted, at least offstage, than either Eddie Vedder or Kurt Cobain. Indeed, the first thing you notice about Reznor up close and personal is the absence of any malice in his mien. Though often painted as some bitter lost soul, his music suggests deeper yearnings toward faith, hope, even charity. Not to deny Reznor's fascination for the dark side: He did live in the Benedict Canyon house where the Manson murders were committed. (He's since moved to the Hollywood Hills above Sunset—even creepier.) He also made the most repulsive video you've never seen for *Broken*'s "Happiness in Slavery," featuring a naked man being mechanically eviscerated and castrated. Then again, Nirvana's *Bleach* boasts "Floyd the Barber," a little tune about the same grisly scenario. Small-town genius-



es seem partial to castration fantasies.

Well, better to externalize it, "to get it out, and feel purged," as Reznor puts it, than to cut off your ear à la Van Gogh. One of the hallmarks of Nine Inch Nail's music is a sense of catharsis, of toxins being purged and cleared, rather than the impacted whining and wallowing in the mire of bands who blindly celebrate their pain. In that regard, Reznor is less pop's Dracula than its Edward Scissorhands, the gentle, wounded Prince of our Disorder, struggling against his isolation to reconnect with a greater whole. His awkward, ingenious mechanical appendages are his computers, MIDI keyboards and studio consoles, which he uses to manipulate or obliterate musical categories. One listen to *The Downward Spiral* will change the way you think about electronic and "industrial" music forever. Combining technique and intuition, Reznor has made machine music which carries the human pulse in ways that astonish. Even the gui-

tars, processed through a virtual wall of electronic mirrors, sound like everything you've ever loved and nothing you've ever heard before.

The child of divorced parents, he was raised by grandparents in Mercer, Pennsylvania, whose bleak cultural landscape echoed Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. Reznor's back door literally overlooked a cornfield. (Mercer made the national news just last month when it suspended all criminal trials for the Christmas season, for fear jurors might imbibe the holiday spirit and prove insufficiently grim.) Every child in a divorce blames him or herself on some level—the mind may forget or rationalize such traumas, but the emotional impact can resonate through a lifetime. For Reznor, classical piano lessons and Kiss fandom eventually suggested a creative outlet via electronic music. A move to Cleveland led to a contract with TVT and 1989's *Pretty Hate Machine*, which spawned two semi hits, "Head Like a Hole" and "Terrible



Lie.” But TVT was expecting more of a pretty hit machine, and two painful years of litigation ensued when Reznor found more compatible quarters at Interscope Records, home to fellow left-field visionaries as Primus, Helmet and Snoop Doggy Dogg. His 1991 EP *Broken* was, as Reznor puts it, “the kind of record that sounds like a real band playing but upon further investigation there’s something definitely wrong with it.” Layering tracks beyond the assimilative powers of the human ear (“if we had 48 tracks we wanted to bury 48 riffs that were meant to come out with repeated listenings”), manipulating raw sounds through intricate machinery, Reznor succeeded in creating an overall effect at once primal and complex. “The starting point there was to make a dense record,” he observes with some understatement. “We approached the new one from the opposite point of view—a record with holes everywhere.”

Indeed, *The Downward Spiral* marks another quantum leap musically for Reznor, even featuring other humanoids, including some Möbius strip guitar work by Adrian Belew. Lyrically, songs like “Mr. Self Destruct” and “Reptile” (“She spreads herself wide open to let the insects in”) are as cheery as ever. But Reznor is not Lucifer with a drum machine; he’s more like the suffering Job crossed with the raging Jeremiah, tearing down the false in a desperate, oddly confident

search for higher, reconciling truths. “You can have my isolation,” he intones on “Closer,” easily his most realized cyberprayer to date. “You can have the hate it brings/You can have my absence of faith/You can have my everything/Help me tear down my reason.”

Over the course of two lengthy conversations, we attempted to do just that, going beyond the how of his music into the “why.” He struggled to answer questions he’d never articulated, perhaps even to himself, but which are very much at the root of his artistry. We even got him to laugh once or twice... okay, twice.

MUSICIAN: *There’s a political correctness creeping into alternative music lately that tries to define punk, or alternative legitimacy, according to an unspoken set of rules. As if being raw and abrasive automatically means you have integrity. They must go nuts trying to pigeonhole you.*

REZNOR: It seems like the media demand that everything be categorized and labeled to be understood, yeah. That became

really apparent when we went to England. This guy comes in to do an interview and he’s really pissed at me. What have I done? And he’s fuming. [imitates his anger]

“Well, what kind of music do you guys play? Are you electronic? Then why the guitars? And your show was bordering on being theatrical—what’s going on?” I said, “You’re the one making up the names, I just do what I do. I’m sorry I don’t fit neatly into your retro-all synthesizer-cyberpunk category bullshit.” I’m watching him struggle with, “I want to like this...but I can’t because I don’t know what I’m liking.” If I told him it was electronic, he’d still be pissed off because it wasn’t pure electronic: “Wait, you’re a synth band but you use guitars!” Well, blow me.

MUSICIAN: *The new album goes beyond blending genres. The machines sound so warm and human, while the vocals sound eerily mechanical. As if the two have switched places.*

REZNOR: I’m flattered you say that. I think I was setting out to make a record that you might not realize is mostly synthetic. When you sit down behind a drum machine and a computer, there’s a very obvious way to use it, and if you read the instructions, the music comes out a certain way. A lot of people reject that because they don’t want a Janet Jackson

or Gary Numan sounding record. It’s dismissed as unfashionable. And I was at a point where I’m thinking, maybe there’s a reason every rock band has guitars, drums, real people playing them. So I started this album on the computer or keyboards, then I fleshed them out by bringing in some guitar. Because of my classical training, I feel more competent on keyboards. As soon as I put my hands on the piano the chord is far richer than the E or A barre chord when I naively play guitar. I know where that added bit of harmonic depth is on keyboard, and that’s one thing I wanted to expand on with this album.

The organic thing is true on a number of levels. This album focuses on decay, and I chose to use a lot more organic sounds, from real instruments to swarms of bees. I hired a guy whose job was to do nothing but sample these sounds. So there were these new textures. But the guitar is a more expressive instrument in many ways; you can get nuances that are very hard to simulate on keyboards, and especially samplers.

MUSICIAN: *I think Pete Townshend once said he wished he could play like Larry Carlton early on. But if he had that facility then, he probably wouldn’t have been so innovative.*

REZNOR: Yeah, there’s a transcription of “Wish” in some guitar magazine, and the best part was where they said, “This middle section is virtually untranscribable.” Alright, success! Now, that main riff has got to be the simplest thing in the world for any real guitar player. But a lot of them ask me how the hell I got that sound. The answer is, Don’t read the instruction book! Fiddle around. The studio itself became a big instrument for me. I didn’t really know how it worked, but that’s where the naivete factor kicks in. You do something “wrong” and think, “Wow, that sound’s cool, why not try this instead?”

Just like my guitar revelation. Everyone mikes the



THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE SIGHT OF EVERY
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speaker. Why not just plug the amp right into the board? That sounds crazy to some people, it's not technically a "good sound." Who cares? What most players might initially think was a godawful sound was inspiring to me and it fit what the track needed. You have to get past the barriers that come with training. I have a hard time working with other engineers, Flood excepted, because they'll try to undo everything I've made sound a certain way because "drums or guitar don't sound like that." Now with computers I can create guitar parts that I couldn't sit down and play.

MUSICIAN: *So we're talking about a kind of "virtual reality" approach to music?*

REZNOR: I try

I GOT EVERYTHING I WANTED IN LIFE...EXCEPT I DON'T HAVE A LIFE NOW.

to avoid any

word that defines the process, but it's a really unique sound. On this album and *Broken* I played stuff right into the board and then into the computer, and manipulated it with programs that don't work in real time. Once it's in there, you can do things to it that have no equivalent in the real world. Like analyze the frequency and flip it upside-down. It takes maybe 10 minutes for the Macintosh to process that cut, and you wind up with sounds that are different from anything you could get otherwise. I like the idea that there are guitar players out there trying to figure them out. Hopefully, that'll cause some misery.

MUSICIAN: *Thematically, the lyrics and vocals have the opposite effect: They're so cold, miserable and mechanical. "The Becoming" seems to be this chilling metaphor of a person literally losing their humanity, becoming machine-like.*

REZNOR: I'm afraid some of this stuff is pretty intense, and I can see how it could be dismissed as calculated or theatrical. But it's real, to me. When I think about the state I'm in, I feel like a fucking loser because I've got things I really should be glad about. I'm aware that I'm fortunate to live in this house and do what I've always wanted to do. And be one of the few who got the record deal. I hear myself bitching about "it sucks to be popular," and I have to just stop because it's bullshit to say that. By the same token, I'm not more happy or content with my life than I was 10 years ago. I got everything I wanted in my life...except I don't really have a life now. I don't have any real friends, any relationships that mean anything to me, and I've turned myself into this music-creation-performance machine. When I got off the road after the *Pretty Hate Machine* and Lollapalooza tours, I didn't write a note of music and I wasn't sure I wanted to do it anymore, to be honest with you. But we had this horrible fucking lawsuit hanging over our heads in order to get off our old label, TVT. *Pretty Hate Machine* was written from the point of view of someone who felt the world may suck, but I like myself as a person and I can fight my way out of this bullshit. *Broken* introduced self-loathing, which is not a popular topic with anybody, especially in a song.

MUSICIAN: *But it doesn't feel like you're wallowing in this pain and betrayal. There's an urge for healing in the howling, a purging of all these emotional toxins.*

REZNOR: I absolutely feel that it's a positive release. Live, some of the songs hit home to where, this sounds idiotic, but honestly, tears just... "Terrible Lie" is one that always kicks into gear. Maybe the first minute I'm adjusting to technically

what's wrong onstage, the monitor is feeding back, but by the end of the song it's taken you over and you mean what you're saying. You can't fake that, people can tell. There's a feeling of elation and a strange sense of calmness. Suddenly, I don't really have a desire to go out and fight people anymore. I've gotten something out of my system, and when you do that four or five times a week for a couple of years that's enough. I didn't need to be around alcohol, drugs, backstage scenarios, adulation. Then there's the weird juxtaposition of singing to audiences about being isolated and not being able to fit into anything or relate to anybody. To find a little niche you can just disappear into and



be normal. To not have pain, and have the path laid out for you, which is something I long for at times. And you're onstage with 10,000 people grabbing at you, do you know what I mean?

MUSICIAN: *We're with you in your isolation. All of us.*

REZNOR: Yeah, and you're meaning what you're singing and looking down at these subhuman things going, Take a shit on my head, spit on me, anything. That fucks up anybody after a while. I've learned these little ploys where when the audience isn't into it I'd ram it down their throats and get them to hate us.

But often by the end of the show, when the last thing you felt like doing was going onstage, and your throat's sore and at some point you look out on the crowd and they know the words and they're shouting them back at you, and they're having a real experience of flushing it out of their systems—it's probably the best feeling of my life.

MUSICIAN: *How easy was it to transfer your one-man electronic show to a full, live-band format at Lollapalooza and the rest of your first tour? Sounds like you made a genuine contact with the audience onstage.*

REZNOR: The way I orchestrated the band worked way better than I'd anticipated. I didn't want to go out with a DAT machine and a couple of guys faking playing drums. In the studio, I'll often program cymbal, snares and hi-hat playing at the same time, whereas a real player would probably go insane trying to do that. I start out with a pretty iron fist saying, "Learn this exactly." Then when they've got it I say, "Let's not turn this into a jazz fusion number, but make it your own." Our drummer Jeff was very rock 'n' roll and pretty soon there's a lot of double-kick rolls and inappropriate things. So it was "Jeff, no rolls, only one fill and nothing where you have time to twirl your sticks." [laughs] I've probably had a reputation for being a prick in a working environment, and sometimes it is my fault. But I

some synth shit or something." After hearing that so many times you start getting macho about it: "I'm gonna make the hardest-sounding record I can."

MUSICIAN: *Offstage, do you get feedback from your fans that your music is helpful or purgative for them?*

REZNOR: I don't know what kind of mail a mainstream rock band gets but we get about one letter out of a thousand that says, "Your music is the only thing that keeps me going." And then, "I totally relate to what you're saying, however..." Insert horrible situation: "My parents beat me, I'm gonna run away; I'm a drug addict; I've tried to kill myself...and if you get this please just call me and respond...you don't know how much that would mean...that would keep me going." I didn't know what to do. I could call this person up, but I'm inevitably going to let them down. I can't talk to you 100 times a day. And if I write a little note, you get one back the next day and another the day after.

MUSICIAN: *You probably would eventually hurt them by trying to help them.*

REZNOR: Yeah, the world fucked them and then I did too, through inaction. I felt shitty about this for four or five days, and after talking to some people I thought the best thing was not to, because I did exchange letters with a woman once and she wanted tickets and she showed up with this, "Hi, we're engaged to be married," scenario. I try to make a point of not being a dick to anyone who comes up to me, and believe me there are many times you don't want someone on your bus fucking with you. I always try to think about if I was meeting someone I respected...

Prince was in the studio here the first day I came in, and somebody said, "Hey, Prince likes your stuff, he had your *Broken* CD in the car and he later actually told his people to mix his tracks a little harder and it might have been due to hearing *Broken*. I thought they were kidding, 'cause this is a guy whose work I respect immensely. Figured it might just be cool to say "hi" if I ran into him around the studio. Then I find myself at one end of a big long hallway and he's at the other end walk-

WHERE I GREW UP IT FELT LIKE THE WORLD HAPPENED IN A PLACE I COULD NEVER GET TO. I COULD SEE A BIT ON TV, BUT I COULDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO IT.

expect it to be done right. And if you're going to do it, let's kick ass and do it.

What I learned after a year on the road was to tell the band, "Look, it's not about the chords you're playing, anybody can do that. It doesn't even matter if you hit the wrong note. Within limits. But this music is about people expressing terrible lives. I'll explain what I meant when I wrote this song—which I would never tell the public—to the band so they understand that our mission is to get our message out to these people tonight and really feel it and mean it. It's not E major and F#. It's *fuck and you*. Play that, and I don't care if you break every single string.

MUSICIAN: *Did that tour influence the sound on *Broken*?*

REZNOR: Definitely. When we played the songs live they mutated, they got heavier and more rock-oriented because of the live drums and guitars and the sound began to take on a life of its own. A lot of people had seen us live and said we were great—then they went, "God, I bought your record and it sucks, man! It's like

ing towards me. So I simply said "hi" and waited for him to make eye contact. He just turned away. That strikes a wrong chord in my Midwestern upbringing regarding simple human decency. I don't mean to sound judgmental, but I've no great desire to meet Bowie now, because in my mind, I'd rather think of him as this cool guy.

MUSICIAN: *Is that why you chose to use Adrian Belew for "The Downward Spiral"? And how was it working with a live musician in the studio for the first time? Any control issues come up?*

REZNOR: No, he was an inspiration. To be honest, I've been listening to a lot of music I avoided when I grew up—like Led Zeppelin—because people who I didn't like liked them. Flood and I have been on a big Bowie kick, *Low*/*Heroes* era, *Hunky Dory*—stuff that I never heard growing up in rural western Pennsylvania. But we were infatuated with that whole *Low*/Belew style of playing, and we wondered if he'd be into doing it. It happened he was in L.A., and agreed to come up to the house the next day, so our bluff was called and we were intimidated. What are we going to do? We figured we'd just put on six songs and have him play through them. So Adrian shows up, totally nice guy, no attitude. But I could tell he was thinking, "What am I doing here?" We were in the living room where Sharon Tate was

murdered, the vibes started... what's going on here? So we rolled the tapes and just asked him to play. He's "Do you want rhythm stuff?" I said, "Anything you feel like doing." "Well. What key is it in?" "Uh, I'm not sure, probably E, see what happens, don't worry about it."

MUSICIAN: *This is exactly what Fripp says Bowie and Eno did to him on the Heroes sessions, incidentally. Go on...*

REZNOR: He said something about just doing something with Paul Simon, and we said okay, this is the anti-Paul Simon. This totally fast machine thing kicks in, he stops for a minute and just starts playing and immediately all of our mouths drop open. Just to see someone who can play that well and tasteful. We stopped the tape and he thought we were mad at him or something. And I said, "No, it's worth paying you just to watch you play, man." Next round, we told him to just make noise, come up with some riffs. Later we cut up the tape and dropped it in where it fit. The end of "Mr. Self Destruct" was all loops and him playing straight in the middle.

MUSICIAN: *Earlier you talked about almost giving up music after Lollapalooza and your tour with Guns N' Roses. Was there a part of you expecting not to be liked? You talked about wanting to almost alienate people at times.*

REZNOR: I think it was the insecurity of heavily overstepped boundaries. With Lollapalooza, we were still an up-and-coming thing. The biggest show we'd ever played was 2000 people. Now we're in front of this scary, potentially hostile audience of 25,000. I was afraid the other bands might be into this star thing, "I want catering!" But everybody, with the exception of Henry Rollins, was totally friendly. I remember Ice T playing guitar with us on "Head Like a Hole," totally cool guy, very talented. But it was a soul destroyer in terms of the technical problems we were having. My performance started revolving around dealing with what was fucking up rather than communicating with the audience. Plus this is the tail end of about two and a half years of touring, compounded by the fact that my drummer had a heroin problem and...now he's dead. And other band members had traumas and I felt beaten up to the point where I was hiding, I couldn't deal with it. The lyrics from "Broken" started to form about then.

Then Axl Rose made contact with us. He was a fan, and wanted to help out. We were going to Europe to do a tour, and figured what better way to confuse people than to open for

GN'R? So we did, and the audience hated us. We were terrified to start with, and then we're talking onstage in front of 65,000 people in Germany. The first song goes okay. Second song people begin to realize we're not Skid Row, who came on after us. Third song they'd confirmed the fact that they've heard a synthesizer and it's time to *attack*. There's something about the sight of every single person flipping you off in a giant stadium that makes you go instantly numb. I started laughing, then insulted them with anything I could think of. At that moment I see this fucking link sausage come flying up onstage and I thought, Okay, Germany, link sausage, you got us. So that was a penis shrinker. Then I looked into the audience and about 20 rows back there's some poor fucking kid holding up a Nine Inch Nails shirt, and I gave him a quick thumbs up. Suddenly there was this scuffle and he was *gone*. Never to be seen again.

That night we get the figures for our T-shirt sales. Out of 65,000 people, how many did we sell? Three. Now, I know I saw one of them myself. You would think, just in the general confusion, some folks might have thought, Oh, that's a cool GN'R T-shirt.

MUSICIAN: *Chaos theory would support that assumption, yeah.*

REZNOR: I thought we would have done at least double digits. Twenty, maybe. That was amazing. The TVT thing is nearing litigation, a two-year process, we're told. I've got to stop doing this for a while. Then some idiot booked us on the stupidest tour of all time, opening for The Wonder Stuff. Were they throwing fucking darts, or what? And those guys were egomaniac fuckheads. I started drinking, which we never do when we play. And I couldn't get this stuff we were talking about out of my system onstage. Then I knew I had to get out but I couldn't. The only way out was through the crowd back to the dressing room, and I struggled but people kept putting me back on the stage. I looked down and our road manager's mouth was a bloody mess. I asked what happened, and he said, "You punched me four times in the mouth!" I freaked, had to get away from that scene, and everything onstage was broken. It was just too much shit to deal with.

MUSICIAN: *Which led to Broken, and the notorious video for "Happiness in Slavery" featuring castration and other gruesomeness. You knew it wouldn't get airplay. People ask, why spend all that money?*

REZNOR: We're not defiantly doing it so it won't get played. We did it because the director

and I were both into gore movies. We're both into feeling repulsed, the feeling of pushing limits, seeing something that makes you squirm...

MUSICIAN: *Why? Because you've been numbed by the world and you need to jolt yourself to get to what you really feel?*

REZNOR: I don't know why. No—I can tell you why. Because I grew up in rural Pennsylvania where it felt like the world happened five hours away in a place I could never get to. I can see a bit of it on TV, but I can't have access to it. And nobody's doing what I would like to do here. I don't know how to do what I want, and I feel crushed because I have this shitty education. There's a lot of things I wish I knew about, like Eastern religions. My scope of travel was maybe a half-hour radius, and every little town had the same K-Mart and Cineplex playing the same five movies, all Sylvester Stallone. It's hard for people who've grown up in cities to understand that, to have an endless cornfield for your backyard. But that's what a lot of America is—it's not dodging gunfire from gangs. I know what I *don't* believe in. I don't have my own life together, really. I don't wake up in the morning feeling spiritually whole, or great about nature or God or the universe. And I've been on a quest instead of finding a way to start a life.

MUSICIAN: *But even Stephen King doesn't get that much horror and hurt from a cornfield. We're all screwed up, but twentysomething artists saw the accelerated collapse of many of your inner and outer supports—religion, government, educational institutions and a 40 percent divorce rate among your parents. It's hard for our minds to understand, or even see, what that can do to our emotions. It's not the only factor, but a therapist friend told me that in 20 years of practice, he's never seen the child of a divorce who doesn't blame him or herself. Mom and Dad, the sole source of security to a child, have come apart. Unconsciously, it's like the kid's trust bone is shattered, which cripples all your relationships until it heals. Cobain, Vedder, both come from broken homes...*

REZNOR: The stuff you're saying makes a lot of sense. [pause] Yes...my parents broke up when I was five. I grew up with my grandparents. It wasn't bad. I love my parents and I'm friends with both of them. I don't blame them at all, because they were really young and I would have done the same thing...

MUSICIAN: *Of course. It's not about blame or guilt. But those emotional scars, that sense of separation, of not being able to trust, is still flushing out, healing up. Looking back, do you sense any of that in your art and life?*

REZNOR: I know I haven't come to terms with all that shit. I just felt sort of...off to the side. I hated school...I fucking hated it. The fact that it revolved around something you didn't have access to. If you weren't on the football team, if you were in the band, you were a leper. When people say those were the best years of our lives, I want to scream. But my parents allowed me to do things that my friends weren't allowed to do. I smoked pot with my dad the first time. I didn't have to be in by midnight. It was an open environment. And when I moved away I didn't completely fuck myself up or become a drug addict, like some of my friends who had a more oppressive home life. But I remember seeing *The Exorcist* when I was 11 or 12. It probably fucked me up permanently because it was the most terrifying thing I could ever imagine. I couldn't discredit it like I could *The Alien*. Because I'd been fed all this bullshit by Christianity that said, yeah, this could happen.

MUSICIAN: *So your parents encouraged your freedom of expression and experimentation, which you use in your music in creative ways to deal with your shit.*

REZNOR: Maybe all this comes down to me seeing *The Exorcist*. But at least I had that liberated, questioning environment, too. We did this long-form video project around *Broken*, and a lot of people thought I'd become fascinated with serial killers, which I'm not. It's more about questioning my own motives—do I have it in me where I could do that? Like in *Silence of the Lambs* or *Red Dragon*, where the scariest thing is when the detective realizes he has this side of his brain where he could figure out what the killer would be doing. Because he has part of that in him. Facing that. Not that I'd go out and kill somebody...

MUSICIAN: *Yeah, the more you're conscious of where your pain or fears really come from, the less they come up as complexes or demons...*

REZNOR: Well, I actually thought I was the anti-Christ after I saw *The Omen* when I was 13.

MUSICIAN: *That explains a lot of your lyrics, plus those funny marks on your forehead. [laughter] One last question. There's a piece on the new album called "A Warm Place" that is unlike anything you've ever done before. It has a lot of heart.*

REZNOR: I wanted to make a little spot in the context of the record where there was a break in the action. In the midst of this build-up of these ever-growing, terrible machines, I just wanted to remember that there is somewhere...else.

TOOLS OF THE DEVIL

Steve Albini supposedly makes a band sound like you're playing in a room," muses Reznor. "I don't know what room he's listening to bands in, but that's not what a real drum kit sounds like to me."

Instead of sampling drums and storing them digitally, Trent put his Tama drum kits in 20 or 30 rooms, then played each drum at different levels of intensity into two PZM mikes. "Then I made banks in my sampler of just that, so everything was in stereo, every drum was just the way you hear it, no close miking, no EQing," he explains. "When I played them on the keyboard I was shocked to find they sounded the same as I remember hearing them in that room. You can tell they're real drums." On *The Downward Spiral*, Reznor's keyboard sampler arsenal included four Akai S-1100s, an Oberheim Expander, a Mini-Moog, a Prophet VS, a Waldorf Microwave and his favorite, the Kurzweil K-2000. "The Kurzweil is the coolest instrument to come along in the last five years," asserts Reznor. He'll import guitar samples played on a late-model Les Paul or Gibson Explorer into the Kurzweil for some "real-time modulation." Other string things include a Fender Precision bass and a Takamine Acoustic. From the samplers, sounds are then fed into his Macintosh Quadra computer and manipulated via his favorite software program, Studiovision by Opcode ("great for MIDI'ing, EQing and creatively distorting guitar sounds") plus Pro-Tools and Turbo Synth, both by Digidesign. Some of Adrian Belew's guitar samples are run through Infinity Looper. Reznor utilizes Marshall JMP-1 and Peavey 5150 amps, and GHS Boomers (Light) strings. Outboard effects include a Zoom 90-30, an MXR Blue Box, a Mutron, a Big Muff and a Screaming Bird, often run through a Demeter preamp. Vocals are usually punched directly into the board via a Shure 58 and an AKG 414 "when we needed a more 'hi-fi feel.'" His "secret weapon" was two old Neve mike preamp EQs ripped out of an old board which he overdrove for vocal distortion effects and "sometimes ran the whole mix through it just to crunch things up a bit." Trent also wants to thank Interscope pres Ted Fields for the loan of John Lennon's Mellotron, and adds that his "hallucinogen of choice" while recording was Cuervo 1800. Presumably MIDI'd through the internal organs directly to the brain.