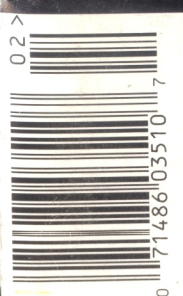


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RAYGUN

ninechnails

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"I'm willing to acknowledge that I have changed as a result of my success, my financial status, my everything else. The fact that I can afford this house, I can pay my gas bill... I'm a fuckin' poor son of a bitch from white trash nowhere.... I know I'm not that same person, and I'm not trying to pretend I am, but I'm also.... I'm probably more sad right now than I've ever been, because I have the added baggage of... this didn't fix it, you know? Like I always thought, 'Man, if I could ever be a rock star....'"

nine inch nails by mark blackwell
photography by jana león

A New Orleans tour group stands in front of the rather ominous two-story 132-year-old Greek Revival mansion in rapt silence. Who amongst the innocent tourists dares to wonder aloud just what evils lurk beyond the ancient ironwork fence, past the flickering gas lanterns, on the other side of that dark door where, unbeknownst to them, the walls of the eerie foyer are spattered with drips of a deep, bloody red. A few whisper of a bizarre murder that took place here, and that the present owner not only works in a disreputable funeral home nearby, but also once occupied a house where one of the most grizzly slayings of the century occurred.

And something very strange is beginning to happen within. The entire front room of the house begins to vibrate violently, yet beyond the closed drapes the onlookers cannot detect a murmur, they cannot see the pictures literally falling off the walls, they cannot hear the deep, booming, evil voice that suddenly shakes the entire darkened den. What madman doth reside in this dwelling?

Well, it's just Trent Reznor, who, along with his trusty dog Daisy, has just finished watching a laserdisc of *Barton Fink* on the large, retractable movie screen in his ultra-soundproof den. Now he's laughingly showing off the tester film for his high-wattage THX sound system, a ridiculously loud gift from the folks at Interscope Records. "YOU UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF THE FORCE!!!" booms Darth Vader, as two framed pictures are shaken off the wall by the throaty vibration. Reznor grins as the short compilation of blaring sound-effects-laden clips plays on.

Nothing wicked this way comes, except for an ale or two and numerous shots of some sweet elixir. It turns out that the rumored murder did not take place here, as far as Reznor knows, though it's true that this former resident of the site of the Manson killings does work in a funeral home – albeit an abandoned one, which he has converted into a high-tech recording studio.

"We hear stories about how that place got shut down for, like, 'improper disposal of bodily fluids,'" Reznor laughs. "I don't know if that's true though. It has a pretty good vibe."

The singer did import to New Orleans more than a touch of necessary evil, however, as the studio boasts a souvenir of sorts – the actual door of the Tate mansion on which the Manson family once scrawled the word "PIG" in blood. This city of dark magic has welcomed Reznor with open arms, even being so kind as to print a photo of his house, address included, on the front page of the paper the very day he moved in.

"And here's where the rock star Trent Reznor of the band **nine inch nails** lives," announces yet another tour guide.

"They come by the front every day," says Reznor. "I'll be opening the window in my underpants and it's like *whoa!*"

But Reznor's been almost too busy to notice these days, as he's been working on a variety of projects, including the soundtrack to David Lynch's new movie *Lost Highway*, a new band called Tapeworm, and long-awaited new work from **nine inch nails**.

Raygun: How did this *Lost Highway* project come about?

Trent Reznor: I had tried to track David Lynch down years ago, just to see if he was a fan and if he'd ever be into doing a video or anything like that. And then one day I got a call through Interscope saying that he was doing a new movie and, much like the Oliver Stone *Natural Born Killers* thing, "Would you be interested in doing a soundtrack on [Reznor's label] Nothing?" I said "Well what is it?" and "I'm a big fan so, yeah, I'm interested." So I talked to David on the phone and he said, "Would you be into me coming to New Orleans and maybe we could sit down and try to score some bits of the movie?" So I said, "Sure." I didn't expect that. And he ended up coming to New Orleans and I had one of the most nerve racking situations I've ever been in. He comes in the studio and it's David Lynch, right, my hero. And he's bigger than I thought, he's exactly that character on *Twin Peaks*, the hard-of-hearing FBI agent. (*booming voice*) "Trent! Well, whaddaya say we get started?!" And I'm sitting there nervous out of my mind. I'd gotten the script and I'd read it. And he goes, "Okay! Here's the scene. The guy's being pursued in a car by the police and I want this sound of chaos." And he's talking real loud, he's real animated. I say, "Did you bring any footage?" (*loudly*) "Nah! I didn't bring any footage. Okay! See what you can come up with!" And he just sits back on the couch. And I thought, "Oh my God."

RG: "This isn't exactly how I work."

Reznor: *Yeah*, but I couldn't...I was like, "All right." And the thing that impressed me was in a way he *knew* he was putting me on the spot. But he was really cool about it. It wasn't like in a shitty way at all. Super nice guy. And it was like three days...we did some good things. It was definitely one of those cool experiences like, "Wow, I think I held my own with someone who was my hero." After that it turned into, "Okay, do you want to do a **nine inch nails** song for the record?" and "Can you coordinate this bulk of music?" which was partially Angelo Badalamenti, which is like prog-orchestral-dissonant, and some, like, pop songs. Smashing Pumpkins has a new song, our new song, Marilyn Manson did a new song, "Apple Of Sodom," Barry Adamson did new stuff. Trying to make a record that was palatable and lived up to what the movie was about.

I'm not a big fan of soundtracks. On one hand, if it's *Mortal Combat*, pop songs with no relevance to the movie, obviously I want nothing to do with that. And David's not about that either. On the other hand, I have a responsibility to sell...there had to be some commercial sense about it. And I hate wearing that hat. It's like I'm concerned that a fan of **nine inch nails** that might buy it 'cause there's one new song or a David Lynch fan...satisfying everyone's needs. I hate kind of being....

RG: Balancing everything.

Reznor: Yeah. When I do a **nine inch nails** record I'm responsible to satisfy only my own "this is what it is." A thing like this needs to be representative of someone else's thing and I want them to feel good about it.

RG: So you wrote the new **nine inch nails** song especially for the movie?

Reznor: "The Perfect Drug" lyrically and thematically was inspired by the film, but musically the way it happened to come out.... It was one of those: One week. Write a song. Mix it. Done. I don't like to work that way. But I reached the stage where I was excited about it, yet it wasn't necessarily appropriate for the movie. And at the end of the day I am nine inch nails and I have to do what's right for me. So I gave it to him and said, "I don't know if this is the right thing for your film sonically, but

this is the song I had to write right now and I had to be true to myself."

RG: "This is where I am."

Reznor: Yeah. And it's not in the film worth a shit. There's ten seconds of a bit of it buried somewhere, but it was just...I don't like being put in that "make a record commercial, add this **nine inch nails** bullshit thing to it." Musically, I was on a whim going way out and it doesn't sound like **nine inch nails**, I don't think. But it was what I had to do.

RG: Are you happy with how the whole project came out?

Reznor: Yeah. I am. For me it's a minor thing, I like it for what it is, but it's not my next major statement. I realize, like in the last year, my detractors will say, "*Where's the new **nine inch nails** record?*" I don't really write when I'm on the road and I've always felt shitty about that. And I made a point when I started the last tour that I'm not gonna do what I did before: just fuck off. But then I got done with the two year tour and what did I do? I fucked off. But the way I write is when I have clear head space and time to think and really be myself. On tour you don't have that time.

RG: Is it difficult to switch gears and get back into writing?

Reznor: Very much so. When you get off the road...I'm not particularly inspired about anything. And that's when the idea of the Marilyn Manson record came up and the *Quake* video game soundtrack and minor things we've been doing. Distractions for me, where I could get outside the pressure of **nine inch nails**. With **nine inch nails** I really feel like everything I do has to really be important. And the chance to work with Manson in the producer capacity was a challenge I hadn't really had before and it was really rewarding. I came up with shit and we got along great and they were my best friends and that was fun.

RG: But it all sort of kept you from **nine inch nails**.

Reznor: What I thought would take two months ended up taking seven months, which further delayed things. And then the soundtrack to *Quake*, which was fun in a different capacity. Maybe my time could be spent better writing **nine inch nails** songs from a sensible career point of view. It would be better if a **nine inch nails** record came out every year instead of every three or four years, but I really didn't have it in me to climb back into the hole and start working, 'cause I wasn't motivated. Now I am. I'm in the trenches working on it and I feel good about it.

RG: So where are you now?

Reznor: Now there's two main things. One is Tapeworm, which is this other band I'm working on, and there's **nine inch nails**. Tapeworm, the idea behind it was – a couple of members of my band, Danny Lohner and Charlie Clouser – it started as kind of a dumping ground for ideas they might have that weren't right for **nine inch nails**, and it's kind of evolved into having its own identity where tentatively I'm more the singer/producer and they're writing the music. It's more of a collaborative thing.

RG: How does it differ from the nails stuff?

Reznor: I want those guys to contribute things and once in a while I'll come up with something that I think is cool, but it's not the giant leap.... Like, if I think the **nine inch nails** record has to be all dobro and Jew's harp, then it has to be that. But maybe I'll write a cool fuckin' riff that isn't right for whatever new artistic plateau I'm hoping for **nine inch nails**, and if I establish this other ground as a place to relax and have fun and maybe make even better music, that's what Tapeworm initially was.

RG: Is this your first real collaborative "band" thing?

Reznor: On this level, absolutely. My first true collaboration musically was the Manson record, where I helped write some of the songs. Twiggy and Manson would come in with a song that wasn't fully a song yet and I'd say, "Okay how can we get a bridge?" or "How can we make the chorus kick ass?" The band kind of became us. It was a cool open thing and a cool vibe. I told those guys at the time, "I envy you guys, you've got a band." But with Tapeworm, I see that side of it.

RG: And you're doing **nine inch nails** at the same time?

Reznor: Some of the Tapeworm stuff may end up being **nine inch nails** stuff, but in my head right now I'm looking at **nine inch nails** as something that comes more out me directly. But it's also more of a thematic thing. That's another reason the **nine inch nails** record didn't start up right away. I need a blueprint before I start building the house and I don't just write a bunch of songs and say, "Okay, I have a record."

RG: What's the blueprint looking like so far?

Reznor: If this makes sense, it's more song oriented. Less dense, more about the *song*, and less about ten songs that are all about this *thing*. That may change, but the way it's going right now it's more minimal and more organic, but more electronic at the same time. But less parts, and each part is more important than on, like, *Broken*, where there's a *million* parts on top of each other. I'd like to have a good melody, and that doesn't necessarily mean more accessible or commercial. I'm more into studying the art form of writing a good song....

RG: What's an example of a "good song" that you've done in that sense?

Reznor: Probably like "Hurt." But I don't mean it has to be quiet and small like that. I'm working with Rick Rubin on the new record and I've told him I need someone outside my head to oversee ideas. Working with Manson, I realized I could see where they were blind. I was outside them. On my own stuff, sometimes I don't have that sounding board I need. With Rick at this initial stage I've been like, "Give me short term goals as to what to do." One of my first things now is I'm gonna rent a house on the ocean somewhere...by myself with my dog, a notebook, and a piano. And write songs with no electronic equipment, no synthesizers, nothing. Just try it and see what comes out.

RG: Have you ever done that before?

Reznor: No. The only song I wrote unlike I normally do was "Hurt," at a piano. I normally get some kind of a groove or a drumbeat or a bass line and fit it around that. And when I say I'm more interested in the structure of what I think is a good song, I'm not saying Gang of Four doesn't write a good song in a groove kind of way, but I'm also interested in the way Tom Petty writes good songs or XTC or *White Album* Beatles. Not that it has to be retro. I really hate the idea of retro and a song that you've gotta be able to play on acoustic guitar. Fuck that. But I'd never thought about a melody, ever. I just write lyrics and music and I go sing it and randomly something comes out and it's the melody. I'm just trying to milk something out of myself. I don't want to do another record the way I've done it. I'd like to think I could stumble upon something really great.

RG: What has inspired you lately, musically?

Reznor: I look at what I listen to now, which is almost entirely ambient or jungle or hip-hop music. No rock at all. Some of the shit that *has* meant the most to me lately is going back and discovering old Iggy Pop records and stuff I didn't know at the time, like Rick turned me on to the *White Album*. I'd always



hated the Beatles ‘cause I hated the people that liked the Beatles when I grew up and I was tired of “Love Me Do” and all that shit. But I’m completely bored by rock music now. I’m sick to fuckin’ death of it. I got turned on to jungle and drum ‘n’ bass stuff and it’s the only shit I’ve heard lately that sounded like, “I’ve never heard music done like this.” “The Perfect Drug” song was a direct result of listening to drum ‘n’ bass stuff. I didn’t want to be a white guy trying to sound like drum ‘n’ bass, but I tried to incorporate what I liked about that into what I do. And it’s jungle influenced but not *imitating* it. It’s through a distortion pedal and fucked-up...and we did an EP; Goldie is doing a remix, Aphrodite, Meat Beat did one, and Orb’s doing one. It’s kind of interesting. The only records I’ve liked lately have been the Fugees, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, and shit like that. Then Wagon Christ, Aphex Twin, shit like that really hit me, like, there’s some fuckin’ cool shit going on and it’s not in the pop music arena, really. Just the idea of cross-pollinization ethnically has been real interesting to me.

RG: Anything is good these days that seems to have *some* new idea, or where at least somebody’s trying....

Reznor: Yeah, trying *something*. Bush. *Go away*, man. Go the *fuck* away. And it’s so disheartening to see. *This is what people like*. Safe crap. Even Bush write good songs for what they do, but what they’re doing is so soulless and so fucking...I couldn’t sleep at night.

RG: Bush was brilliant to come along when they did from a commercial standpoint. They hit the nail on the head.

Reznor: Well, *you* hit the nail on the head. “From a commercial standpoint.” And that breaks down to, “Why are you doing it?”

RG: Is there anything wrong with just purely trying to sell a ton of records?

Reznor: Not at all. But I think of it as art, as life, and as something that needs to make a statement. I don’t have a problem – well I *do* have a problem – with crass commercialism bullshit. I’m not trying to be shitty, but there’s a degree of ripoffness where if you can’t see it, either you’re a dumbass or you’re lying to yourself and you can’t sleep at night. If I sound like a snotty nosed art rock critic turd...it’s just, if it’s been done, why the fuck do it? Though there’s nothing wrong with borrowing. I’ve borrowed out the ass.

RG: It’s the “nice guy” syndrome with Bush, though. Nice guys. Talk to ‘em and they’ll tell you their hearts are totally into it.

Reznor: Yeah, they’re the guys that probably think they’re changing the world, but I could tell him he’s just written a Pixies song. I’d have more respect for them if they were calculated careerists that knew, “Yeah we’re ripping them off. We’re rich,” than dummies who don’t realize the obvious. Not to sound harsh, I don’t *hate* them, and I hope that’s not the big bolded sentence of your fuckin’ article. But I see the band that’s number one and go (*makes cringing face*). One of two things. First: What a *sad* situation. And secondly: Are people really *that dumb*?

RG: The top of the charts....

Reznor: Alanis Morissette. I remember *exactly* the first time I heard that “You Oughta Know” song. I was finishing *Smells Like Children* with Manson. I didn’t have my studio yet, so we were about an hour and a half north. It was dawn, we’d been up all night, we’d just finished the last mix. There’s a 30-mile bridge that goes across the lake right above us. Everyone’s in the van, I’m in the front seat. I’m almost asleep, sun’s up, seven in the morning, driving across this bridge. And that song comes on and it *woke me up* because I couldn’t believe how bad the lyrics were. Like, “Did she just say, ‘I’ll go down on you in a theatre?’” (*laughs*) And everyone woke up and was like, “Oh my God, this is the *worst* fuckin’ thing I’ve ever heard!” And in the back of my mind I’m going, “This is gonna be the *biggest fuckin’ single of the summer*.”

RG: That’s so weird, because I remember exactly where I was, too. I was driving down an offramp onto the 10. And I was thinking, “Oh, man, this is gonna be the biggest song....”

Reznor: What a *terrible* thing! (*laughing*) People go, “I remember where I was when Kennedy was shot.” Well, uh, we remember where we were when we first heard “You Oughta Know!” (*laughing*) Oh! Here’s a chick that got dumped! She’s *bitchin’* at you, “I’m *not gonna just leave!*”

RG: And we both remember when we first heard it. That’s pathetic.

Reznor: It’s true though! (*laughing*) There’s other things like that. When I heard (*sings*) “She Drives Me Crazy,” I was thinking, “That’s a big hit,” but I liked it in a guilty kind of pleasure way. Same with (*sings*) “Groove Is In the Heart.” That was the best single of whenever the fuck that came out, as a guilty pleasure. But *goddamn* this Alanis Morissette.

RG: If you can hear a hook on the radio and know it’s a smash hit, do you ever hear that in your own head? Something so stupid and commercial that you might not, or might, use it?

Reznor: When I’m writing my own stuff?

RG: Yeah.

Reznor: Not really. What I do think about when I’m writing a song, like “Perfect Drug” – probably unlike a Skinny Puppy or a Neubauten – I *am* involved with reeling the listener in and keeping enough...it’s like sugar and it’s something to cling on to. This song was almost a study in tolerance, where there was basically no melody at all and *right* when you’re about to give up (*snaps*) – probably the poppest chorus I’ve ever written in my life. I think in those terms, but it’s hard for me to tell when I’m writing a great song. When **downward spiral** was finished and I played it for the record label I said, “Look, I have to apologize, not for the content, because this is what I have to do, but I don’t think there’s anything radio is gonna play, there’s no ‘Head Like A Hole.’” And they said, “‘Closer.’ Big hit.” And I said, “You’re *kidding* me.” For me, that was the scariest song I had ever written at that point ‘cause it was so obvious in a silly disco way with like the Prince harmonies like *help me*, and all that shit. I thought, “Man, people are gonna think I’m a *pussy* if I put this out.”

RG: Really?

Reznor: Yeah. But that’s what I *should* feel. I could make a million “Happiness in Slavery” screaming, snarly...that’s what people would expect and that’s what fishnet-wearing men, skirt-wearing *Propaganda* readers would expect, but to do something that really opens me up for attack....

RG: Do you feel you could easily get pigeonholed?

Reznor: Absolutely.

RG: RAYGUN did an interview with David Bowie recently where he said something like that about you. That he really admired what you did, but that you could easily back yourself into a corner with the “bummed out” heavy type subject matter you usually deal with. At some point might you have the need or desire to project some sort of brighter side?

Reznor: You’ve got a good point. That’s one of the things that Rick Ruben brought up. “You’ve gotta

realize the danger is that you paint yourself in that corner.” And I realize that. My last record was probably the most extreme I could do of that. But I’ve also entered a new level of maturity where, like...I never thought I could be married before. And it’s not like I’m ready to do that, but it doesn’t seem as foreign to me. I’d like to have a kid someday. I never thought I’d ever...again, I’m not set up to do that....

RG: I’d imagine this house would be pretty foreign to you a couple of years ago.
Reznor: Absolutely. So I’m also willing to acknowledge that I have changed as a result of my success, my financial status, my everything else. The fact that I can afford this house, I can pay my gas bill...I’m a fuckin’ poor son of a bitch from white trash nowhere....

RG: It would be difficult to sit here and put yourself in the same mind state you put yourself into a few years ago.

Reznor: I know I’m not that same person, and I’m not trying to pretend I am, but I’m also.... (*long pause*) I’m probably more sad right now than I’ve ever been, because I have the added baggage of...this didn’t fix it, you know? Like I always thought, “Man, if I could ever be a rock star....” Some stupid fuckin’ naive dream, and then you get it and...I’ve been at the *lowest* point, and I’m not just *saying* this; it *didn’t work*, man. I mean, my job is...I wake up and make music and work with people I respect, and David Bowie will take my call, so why...do I want to kill myself, you know? It sucks.

RG: No matter how good things get around you, what’s in your head is still what’s in your head.

Reznor: See, artistically I’ve got so many more things I’ve gotta do. It’s not like I feel I’ve done anything real. I’ve made a couple of decent records and that’s it. I’ve got a million more things I wanna do, but just as a fuckin’ human that wakes up every day I realize that I *hate* people. I don’t get along, I don’t like people, they don’t like me, I’ve.... (*sighs*) I’m tired of living here alone with the dog. It’s shitty. And on top of that I’m attacked by every fuckin’ level.... I mean, off the record....

RG: (*Reznor tells the story of how some people screwed him over recently, then a while later we move on to happier relationships, such as his possible collaboration with Dr. Dre.*)

Reznor: Dre’s a fucking genius. Rick Rubin and I met him in the valley like two weeks ago...he’s expressed interest in working with me in some capacity and, like, the same day Ice Cube sent me a fax saying, “I want to work with you,” and Ice Cube, I think, is the best rapper I’ve ever heard ever.

RG: So are they gonna remix stuff or...?

Reznor: No, that’s our whole thing. Not to make it a remix situation where it’s like white boy remixed by so and so or me singing on a Dre track or Ice Cube singing on a **nine inch nails** track. The idea is to have it become the impetus to make some new kind of music. When I talked to Dre it was like, “Let’s *change music*.”

RG: So it won’t be like Anthrax playing on a Public Enemy song.

Reznor: Exactly. That for me is what’s inspiring about the idea of true collaboration, cross culturally, where I could say to Dre, “Don’t think I can only do this one thing. I’m gonna give you something that will blow your mind. Let’s try it. Maybe it sucks and we don’t put it out, maybe it’s great. We could change the fuckin’ world.”

RG: As you’ve broadened the thing you started out with and it has gotten more popular, do you worry about people....

Reznor: I’ve commercialized a respected form of music and....

RG: That wasn’t what I was gonna ask, but....

Reznor: I’m very proud of what I’ve done. I sleep well at night knowing that, but at the same time another part of me knows that I kind of cannibalized a couple of forms of music that I was very much a fan of and synthesized ‘em into something. But that’s the art part of me saying that. The other part of me says, “All you did was bastardize this into this.” And I don’t fully believe either one of those. It’s kind of both. I do think that I’ve done something really good.

RG: You can’t worry about the “underground” people who might say you “sold out.”

Reznor: I can’t dictate what’s cool and what’s not cool. I got over that whole thing about that elitist underground: “Okay, you’re unknown so you’re cool, now you’re known so you’re not cool.” *Fuck you*. But that’s where I was once, so it was difficult to divorce myself from that. I was the guy that had that Psychic TV import and paid 15 bucks for it and it was shitty but no one else heard it so it was cool. I understand that.

RG: What I was gonna ask before was, do you worry about maybe not being as relevant after waiting a while to put a record out? I mean, now you’ve gotta worry about the commercial potential.

Reznor: I do.

RG: Are you worried about....

Reznor: Whether I’m pertinent a couple of years from now?

RG: Yeah.

Reznor: Yeah. I think about it. Absolutely. Times change.

RG: People have short attention spans.

Reznor: Absolutely. Will I be upset if my next record sells 100 copies? Yes, I’ll be upset to a degree. I’d *like* to say, “No, it doesn’t mean anything to me,” but it does. But I use that kind of fear as a motivation factor to work on new music. ‘Cause I hate writing music at night. I’m afraid of it, I’m afraid of myself and I’m afraid of my head and I’m afraid that I don’t have anything new to say at all. And it’s easier to take on a lot of projects, to be honest with you, that don’t mean anything, like *Quake* or Manson or *Lost Highway* or whatever the fuck else to avoid the real issue. That’s always been the way my brain has worked.

RG: Other projects are almost a form of procrastination?

Reznor: Absolutely. I’m the *laziest* motherfucker in the world. Any way I can waste time or avoid the painful self-examination of writing. I could do the next 15 David Lynch movies and it would be easy and I wouldn’t have to deal with what I don’t wanna have to deal with. The thing that pisses me off is when I get labeled as insincere or whatever if I allude to bring normal and happy or whatever ‘cause I’m enjoying the benefit of something that’s gained me that. But the act of creation is the most joyous and the most painful thing as a human that I’ve ever experienced.

RG: People accuse you of, “Oh, he’s not this miserable character from his songs,” even though, it seems to me, that in interviews you’ve been pretty honest about what kind of person you are.

Reznor: When I started out with **nine inch nails** and it went from my journal entries to songs to “You’ve got a record deal,” I thought, “I’m not as interesting as Perry Farrell.” Like, I wasn’t a male prostitute or a heroin addict and I’m kind of a normal fucker. I’m just a fucked-up guy that just wants to say why I’m fucked-up. And I don’t have this elaborate weird lifestyle, but I thought if I have the chance, well,



maybe I should *portray* myself as somebody. And I thought, “No, I couldn’t really keep the lie up so I’ll just be truthful.” And when I was truthful and said, “This is how I feel, this is how I am, who I am,” it’s followed by, “Oh, you’re not really this vampirish, suicidal, Joy Division hanging yourself kind of guy.” Well, that *is* part of my personality. For some reason part of my brain doesn’t work right. I’m not happy. The only time I really want to murder people is when some fuckin’ writer claims I’m fabricating everything just to be this *thing*. I hate doing interviews, ‘cause I feel like I’m spreading my butthole open. You’re talking to someone who gets to tell the world their version of you.

RG: And who might paint the “sad” thing as some sort of act.

Reznor: When someone asks me, “What are *you* sad about?” it just tells me that the person asking that has never attained any goal they’ve set out to do, because it’s not *about* reaching your goals. Part of me is like, I feel extra shitty that I’m not elated at what I’m doing. But another part of me that I’ve been thinking about recently, when I realize I’m still sad in a weird way...when I was doing *Broken*, I said, “All I want to do is finish the record so I can get out on tour.” Because the only time I’d ever felt like I *belonged* to anything is when I was on tour and getting some kind of reward. Fuck, man, you’re sitting in your bedroom writing, ready to kill yourself, and then you’re on stage and you’re meaning this and you’re ready to start crying and seeing people mouthing back your words. And you see people that seem to *understand*.

RG: At the level you’re at now, does that still mean as much? Like making eye contact with a kid who gets it?

Reznor: Abso-fuckin’-lutely. At Woodstock...and as I’ve said a million times, we did that just to make money to pay for our tour...I got on the stage and we sounded shitty and I was so fuckin’ nervous....

But I got off the stage and I don’t care how the fuck we sounded because I felt like I *made contact*.

RG: But then some people probably *don’t* get it.

Reznor: When we first went out...I remember the agony of writing those lyrics and going through that shit and finally you meet people backstage and you think, “Is *this* what the fuck I....? Why did I go to such effort?” Some guy’s like, “Is that song about *Satanism*?” It’s like, *what!?* I realized after meeting some of these people, like, *fuck*, is everyone an idiot? No one seems to get what I meant. Then I realized I wouldn’t be the guy waiting backstage to hang out. Walking down Bourbon Street and seeing a karaoke bar and hearing “Closer” with frat guys singing – that’s *not* the ideal forum for that song. That’s as inappropriate as I could ever think it would be, but I can’t say it *shouldn’t* be there. But I *do* think there are people that get it. If I didn’t think that....

RG: With the type of thing you write about, the mental state of being in a hole or whatever....

Reznor: All I ever wanted to write about was a *way out*. And not a pretentious philosophy of something, just...when I wrote this shit it made me feel better about myself. People say, “Oh you’re so *negative* blah blah blah,” but by my screaming about it and getting it out of my system, it helped me. And when people say, “Hey, I know how you feel,” whether they do or not, who cares? It’s a catalyst, and that’s what’s cool about it. And I’ll say another stupid thing, though it’ll probably look bad: People were saying I’m painting myself in a corner, you say Bowie even said that.... I see that, and there was a point where I realized, kind of sadly, when I was starting on **downward spiral** and I thought about when I saw the Police when I was a senior in high school and I thought about this whole arena full of people singing, “One world is enough for all of us.” And there was this *positive* kind of weird *good* vibe going on...but I’m sitting there thinking, “I’m on a fucking path to self-destruction...and I wish that there was some kind of....”

RG: Some cathartic negative “statement” to sing along with?

Reznor: I was thinking about...a lot of times it seems to me the statements in my head and the words and the sentences and the lines I come up with that are the most dramatic.... When I write them down and I think, “That’s a good line,” they also have a kind of...they also sometimes *are* for the *drama* of the thing. Certain things I’ve written, like even something as ridiculous as “I wanna fuck you like an animal,” I knew it would be...it’s an attention grabber and juvenile in a sense.

RG: But the funny thing about that line is you thought that song might make you look like a “pussy”....

Reznor: *Musically*, that’s what I was saying. Why I thought that line would work in that song was the music was the most obvious silly disco, Prince, Soft Cell type thing and to put something like that over it....

RG: To hear that song on the radio you’re kind of off the hook because of that line, just because you’re sort of getting away with something obviously extreme.

Reznor: There’s another way to look at that, too. That’s the strip bar anthem, the frat bar anthem...fuckin’ bullshit. And what gave that some integrity, I think, was the video, which is great and which I had very little to do with. Mark Romanek did it. And then it was flattering and irritating to see many other bands step right up to the plate and rip it off.

RG: One thing that bugs me is people doing shock value stuff just for the sake of shock value. With no content....

Reznor: Yeah. I could take a video of me taking a shit and here’s a close-up of the turd coming out and that’s offensive. But it’s not...anyone could do that.

RG: Just going back to Marilyn Manson...I’m open to whatever people wanna do and I’ve got nothing against them, but they *really* push that “shock” thing sometimes. I don’t mean to imply something stupid like, “It is bad for the kids?” but....

Reznor: Is it responsible? Is that what you mean?

RG: Yeah.

Reznor: There was one moment when I was sitting with Manson and all the people from Interscope and one of their songs ended with a big long diatribe of a computer voice saying, “*You might as well kill yourself. You’re already dead.*” And I had the president of Interscope looking at me like (*blank face*). But I’ve created an arena where I’ll never tell anyone who I invite in, “You can’t do that.” I swore I’d never fuck with the art or whatever you wanted to say. And I thought on **downward spiral** when I wrote that poem over the song “downward spiral” that talked about killing yourself and making it kind of sexy, I felt like I needed to do it when the record came out. But the *worst* thing I could *ever* hear is that someone fuckin’ shot themselves.

RG: “Trent Reznor told me to do it.”

Reznor: And I *never*...that’s not what...I meant to demystify it by acknowledging it there.

RG: That you had these feelings as well.

Reznor: Exactly. To me that was the ultimate, “I’m not the only person that felt that way growing-up” shit, where I felt, “I can’t fit into this fuckin’ world. Fuck, yeah. Someone else understands.”

RG: That’s why I mentioned it with Marilyn Manson. Personally, I get the impression that you put a bit

more thought behind it than he might.

Reznor: There may be a different end result. I did personally talk to Manson and say, “Realize the repercussions. If you’re a band that sells 5000 records that’s one thing, but the bigger you get, the more people want to fuck with you and the more responsibility you have.” I’m an advocate of *no* censorship, no one should be able to tell you what you can or cannot experience and I think empowering the individual is the key. My parents: “You wanna try drugs? Here, do ‘em. You wanna have a drink? Here, have a drink.” Puked on the rug that night. And then, “Well, how was it?” It was demystified.

RG: But some people might not be smart enough to deal with that.

Reznor: I can’t believe that I’m smarter than anyone else. I don’t have the right to think I can say....

RG: You *know* that you’re smarter than anybody who would be stupid enough to....

Reznor: There is a degree of responsibility. But I’m all for dangerous material getting into the mainstream. As I’ve gotten bigger and infiltrated the Kmart’s and the fuckin’ Idahos, I’m into putting a record out that gives them something they’ve never heard before and might be dangerous and their parents might be pissed off about it. But at the same time now, as a human being, I think there’s a degree of...I’m not gonna say, “Take a knife and cut your throat if you’re bummed out,” kind of vibe. I’m not about that.

RG: But that Marilyn Manson “you might as well kill yourself” thing is along the same lines.

Reznor: You may be right in a way, but there’s a schtick to the whole thing. And they’ll get to maturity where they’ll see that. But also try to understand what I’ve tried to offer the people around me is this protection. And when their first record came out, Interscope, who is now making a lot of money off the new one, wasn’t gonna put it out. Why? “‘Cause it’s alluding to rape and....” “Well, I’m not changing it. Fuck you. Don’t put it out.”

RG: But can you imagine a limit?

Reznor: I know what you’re saying, just from a responsibility factor. It’s all fun and games in the studio and it’s funny to say this and that, but it’s another thing when someone fucking kills themselves, some impressionable....

RG: I’m just playing Devil’s...well, Devil’s advocate might not be the right term here. I’m just asking.

Reznor: I know that. I know exactly what you’re getting at.

RG: Like, “Mom, I want the new Marilyn Manson CD for Christmas.” Just one look at the *cover* and Mom is like, “What the fuck?”

Reznor: That’s what’s great about it! It *should* fucking piss off your parents. It should be ridiculous. And where I think Manson has a somewhat dangerous message within that, it *should* do that. See, now rock is pumped into your house every second, every day. It needs a kick in the ass. To what degree of extremity...who knows?

RG: But you have to have something beyond the shock value.

Reznor: I fully agree with what you’re saying. I’m 31 now, and I’ve thought about kids and marriage and adult things and stuff I never thought I’d ever dream of. I’m not saying I’m an old man now, but I also see that the new challenge is how to promote yourself in a way that’s true to who you are. I don’t want to be singing “Head Like A Hole” at age 50. I’m aware that maybe my appeal had been this *extreme* statement that appeals to whoever. But everything that I’ve done has been honest to where I’ve been at the time and it always will be.

RG: Do you feel as you get older...when you’re a kid you get really excited and music is the way you – Reznor: – identify yourself. Absolutely. The bands you like, that’s your club.

RG: That’s your thing. What was the first record you bought?

Reznor: The Partridge Family, the one that had the phone number on it.

RG: What was the first concert you saw?

Reznor: The Eagles with Fleetwood Mac and Boz Scaggs. It was the greatest thing. My dad took me and I had a hit off a joint....

RG: I’m asking just because, when you’re a kid music things like that start to form the way you look at life. Those memories are emblazoned upon you. But as you get older....

Reznor: But it’s a different thing now, too. Think about this: back then, like, I grew up in a small town and MTV wasn’t pumping information at you, and you looked forward to staying up on Friday to watch “Midnight Special” or whatever.

RG: “Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert.”

Reznor: Yeah. You didn’t have...like I think about Aerosmith now and every 15 minutes there’s fuckin’ Steven Tyler on TV. It’s safe now. You don’t have to seek that out.

RG: Weird musical milestones on TV stand out for me, like the Plasmatics on “Fridays,” when they sawed their guitar in half.

Reznor: Yeah! “Fridays” with Michael Richards.

RG: Kramer.

Reznor: I can *totally* fuckin’ remember that! I remember KISS on that from *Music From The Elder*, when Gene Simmons was crying. But now it’s...not to sound like an old *turd*, but it’s different now.

RG: But maybe it’s not. What I’m getting at...is there a way to put yourself into that mindstate to realize *you’re* doing that for people now? Fifteen years from now they’ll talk about you like this.

Reznor: I think we, as people our age, have to understand the medium has changed from the Internet down to MTV pumped into your house every second. It’s different now.

RG: Just accessing something that others don’t have is harder.

Reznor: It’s again that elitism of music and...also understanding that for me personally music *has* been... I remember songs that I first heard, where I was. That’s my *soundtrack to life*. And not everybody is about that. Like I remember (*sings*) “Fooled A-round And Fell In Looove.” That’s was what was playing at the Eagles concert at the stadium when I got passed a joint with my dad, and that was the *coolest thing* I had ever done at that point. I had a T-shirt that I got made at Kmart with iron-on letters that said “EAGLES” ‘cause they were my favorite band. There *are* people that maybe now Marilyn Manson is doing that for them, but juxtaposing a different situation on it and realizing it’s a different climate. One thing I always thought growing up was like, “Man, I hope I never get to the age where I don’t like toys anymore ‘cause I love Christmas and I love getting toys.” Later I thought, “I hope I never get to the point where I lose touch with what’s going on musically.” But then you realize this weird thing of maturity creeps in. Understand that I’m not saying I’m Mr. Old Guy right now, but I’ve gone through changes and I realize I’m not 21 right now and I still like innovative, cool things...but I’m lying if I think my brain hasn’t changed.