

**SPECIAL 12TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**

**SPIN**

# THE SPIN 40

THE MOST VITAL ARTISTS  
IN MUSIC TODAY

A PHOTO ALBUM  
FEATURING

NO DOUBT • U2  
HOLE • OASIS  
ALANIS • BECK  
AND...?

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**TIMOTHY McVEIGH**  
The Gulf War Years

Trent Reznor  
The Evil "One" Speaks



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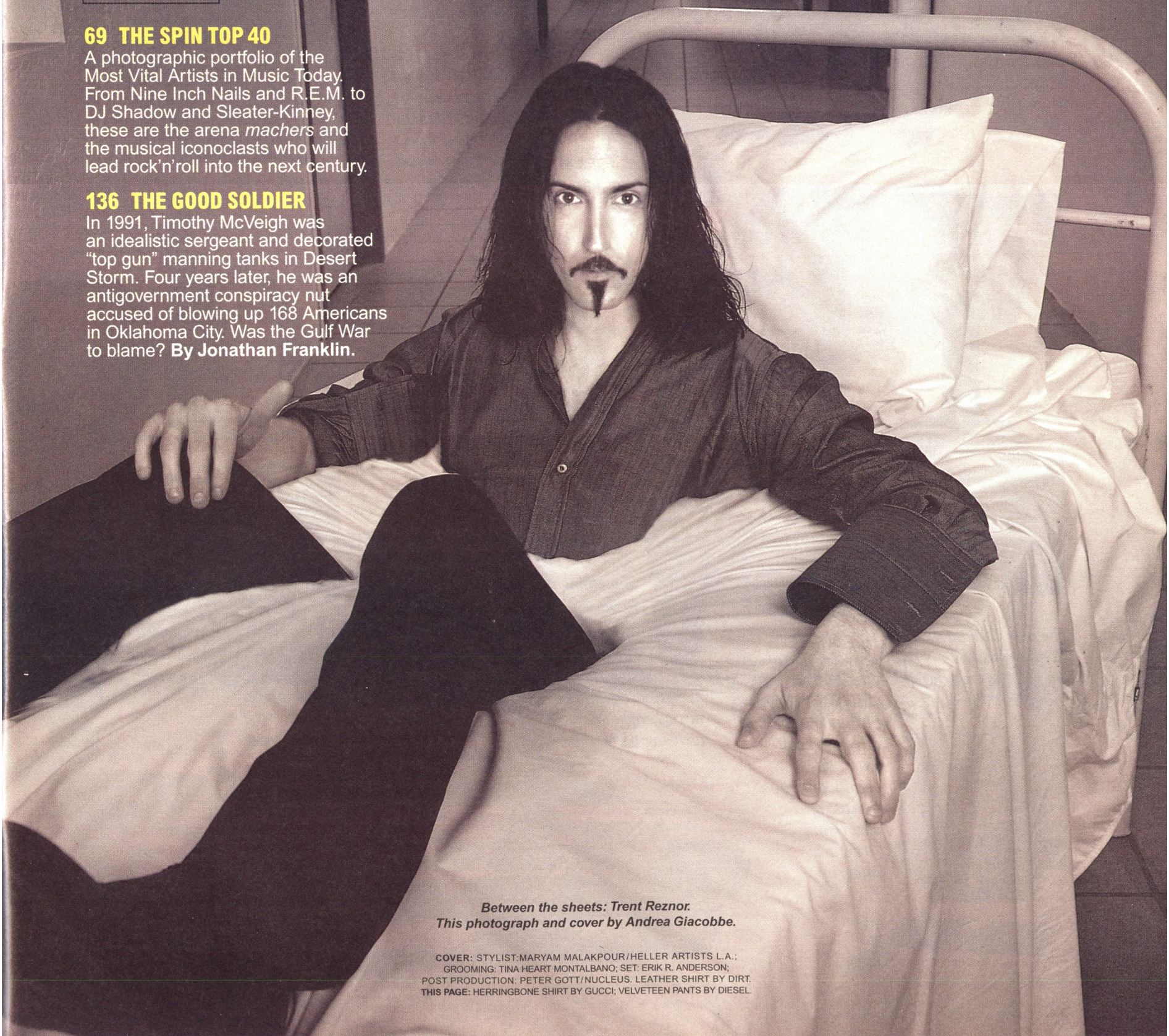
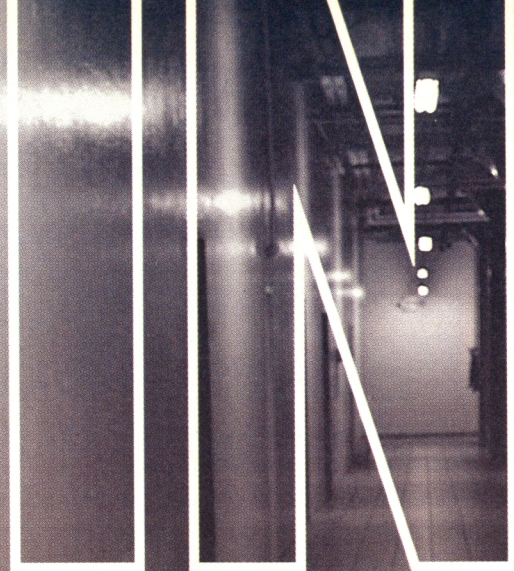
## FEATURES

### 69 THE SPIN TOP 40

A photographic portfolio of the Most Vital Artists in Music Today. From Nine Inch Nails and R.E.M. to DJ Shadow and Sleater-Kinney, these are the arena *machers* and the musical iconoclasts who will lead rock'n'roll into the next century.

### 136 THE GOOD SOLDIER

In 1991, Timothy McVeigh was an idealistic sergeant and decorated "top gun" manning tanks in Desert Storm. Four years later, he was an antigovernment conspiracy nut accused of blowing up 168 Americans in Oklahoma City. Was the Gulf War to blame? By Jonathan Franklin.



*Between the sheets: Trent Reznor.  
This photograph and cover by Andrea Giacobbe.*

COVER: STYLIST: MARYAM MALAKPOUR/HELLER ARTISTS L.A.;  
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THIS PAGE: HERRINGBONE SHIRT BY GUCCI; VELVETEEN PANTS BY DIESEL.



## 1

## NINE INCH NAILS

Photographs by Andrea Giacobbe.

What's it take to be named the Most Vital Artist in Music Today? A singular vision, scores of imitators, and a willingness to trash the competition. As **Neil Strauss** learns, **Trent Reznor** fits the bill perfectly.

Eight years ago, Trent Reznor seemed like a throwback, beating the dead horse of industrial rock. Today, he seems like a visionary, the first rock star to make synthesizers cool for teenage headbangers, paving the way to popularity not just for countless knock-off industrial acts but also, to some degree, for the hyper-trendy beats of techno and electronica.

Unlike many musicians, Reznor is savagely aware of his place in the current strata of pop stars. He constantly compares himself to other musicians, saying that he "can't write a thousand songs like Billy Corgan," that he's "not as careerist as [Marilyn] Manson," that he "can't sing about [his] big dick like David Lee Roth." It's for this reason, in large part—these intense feelings of self-consciousness and competition—that the most vital artist in music today has completed only one new song in the past three years.

While cleaning off a place on the couch at Reznor's cliff-side house in Big Sur, where he's holed up writing the follow-up to 1994's *The Downward Spiral*, I spot an envelope. Scrawled in black pen are the words NEW SONGS. I don't open it. I do notice, however, that it's very thin.

**SPIN: Is it fair to say that you suffer from writer's block?** Trent Reznor: I'm afraid to really push myself and write because I'm afraid of failure. When I was doing *The Downward Spiral*, I was kind of freaked out, and Rick Rubin, who's doing the new record with me, was trying to talk to me. And I just wanted to kill myself. I hated music. I was like, "I just want to get back on the road because I hate sitting in a room trying

to, trying to"—how do you say this?—"just scraping my fucking soul." Exploring areas of your brain that you don't want to go to, that's painful. You write something down and you go, "Fuck, I can't say that. I don't want people to know that." It's so naked and honest that you're scared to let it out. You're giving a part of your soul away, exposing part of yourself. I avoid that. I hate that feeling of sending a tape out to someone: "Here's my new song. I just cut my soul open. Check it out. Criticize it."

**Let me ask you then: Why do you think SPIN chose you as the most vital artist in music?**

I don't know. I've no idea. I was pretty shocked when I was told, "Hey, you're number one." I was like, "Is this good?" Because I can already read the letters the next month saying, "Fuck that, man. Why didn't you choose so-and-so."

It's nice, though, to have some kind of mainstream-media appreciation. I thought we'd always skirted super-attention. There are a hundred books on Courtney Love in *Waldenbooks* and there's none on us. So it's flattering. But, you know, I'm just a footnote in rock history, the guy that had mud on at Woodstock. "Where Are They Now: The Nineties."

**Do you ever wonder, "How am I going to make sure I matter in the next decade?"**

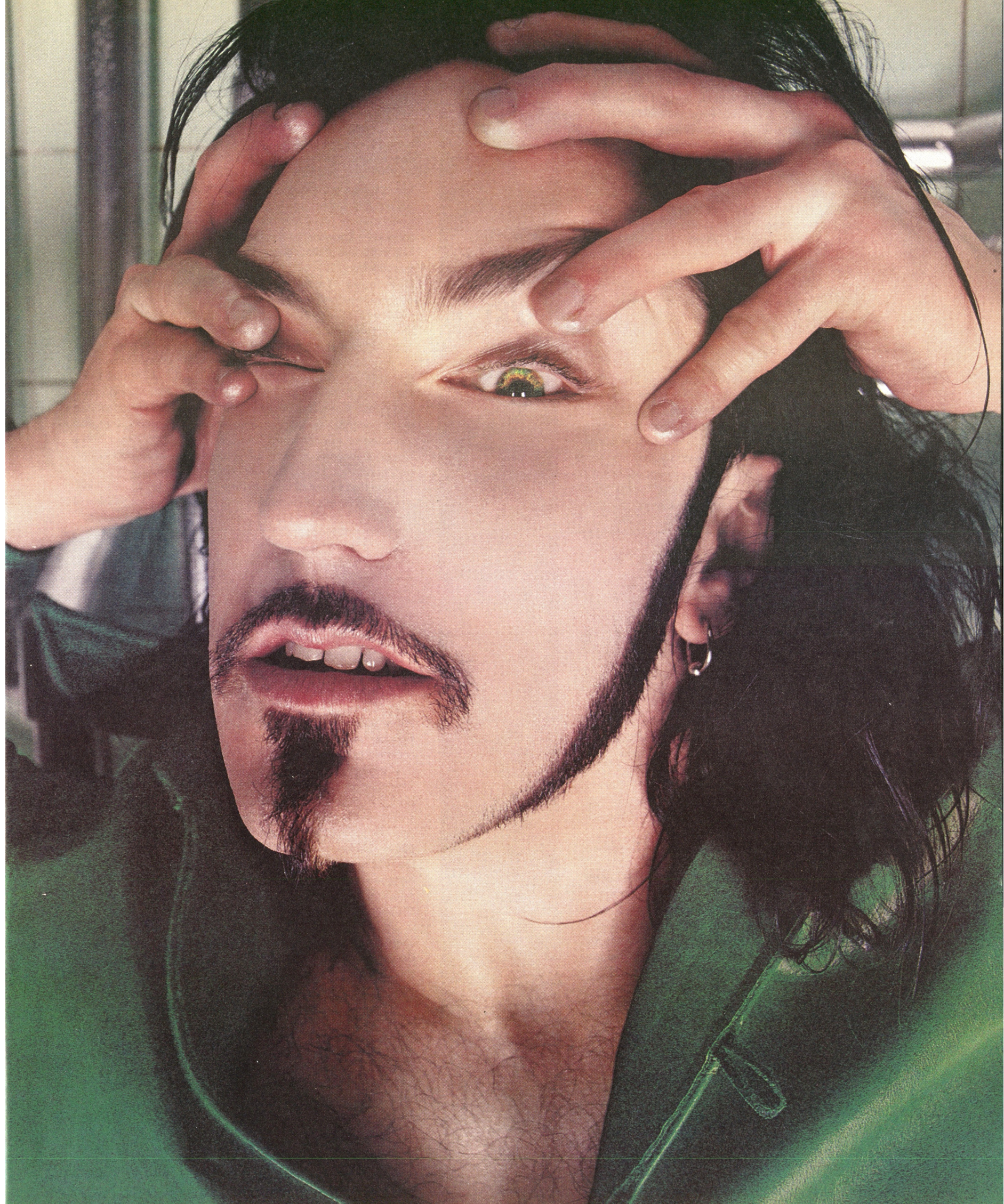
Jimmy Iovine of Interscope Records, who I respect a lot, said to me at one point, "I'm president of Interscope and not a producer anymore because I see guys like you and Dre come along, and I can't compete on that level." When you think about the rock world, there's a window of time where what you do has pertinence and meaning. I hope ten years from now I'm making soundtracks or producing or something. I don't want to be putting mud all over myself at the Sands in Las Vegas.

I'd love to think someday that I made a difference, I changed something, I shifted the axis somewhat. But all I can do is try to make the best music I can. Not go into it thinking, "I'm going to change shit." It becomes calculated if you cater to the idea of shifting things. I think we have in a subtle way, but, um, yeah, I'd love to be remembered. [Sarcastically] Elvis, Lennon, Reznor.

**Do you think that you helped pave the way for the mainstream acceptance of techno and electronica?**

Maybe. It starts sounding real egotistical if I take any stance on that. But to answer your question, I think we definitely took a







certain element of harder-edged electronic music to the shopping mall. You might say that my success was to take industrial music and add a melody to it, add an element of pop to it. It connected with people in a way that we didn't anticipate.

**How about these sort of one-hit-wonder industrial bands like Stabbing Westward and Gravity Kills. Do you feel responsible for them?**

Look at it in terms of the music-industry follow-the-leader approach: "Okay, Nirvana's big, let's sign every band that sounds like them." I'm sure after Nine Inch Nails had some success, other labels asked, "Who sounds like them?" Do I think that Stabbing Westward and Gravity Kills were part of that? Yeah, I do. Were they ripping me off? Yeah, I kind of see that, and then I think, "Do I whine like that? Am I perceived as that?"

I think there's few innovators and many imitators. It shocks me to see Bush go to No. 1. Not to single them out, but I just can't respect them. Do they write good songs? Yeah, they've written some good songs. But I cannot respect or tolerate the lack of innovation.

Music is my life. I know everything I can know about it. I know that it's not background. It's not stuff you put on in the car to drive home from your job at IBM. It means something to me. And that's why I hate when something so uninteresting can be so successful. But I'm going into it with this purist attitude. I can see that Bush song as exactly this Nirvana song. I can tell. Fuck them for doing that, you know? But it's also well-written enough that a guy who comes home from work can say, "Yeah, that's a good song. These guys rock."

**"IT SHOCKS ME TO SEE BUSH GO TO NO. 1,"  
SAYS REZNOR. "NOT TO SINGLE THEM OUT, BUT I CANNOT RESPECT OR  
TOLERATE THE LACK OF INNOVATION."**

**Exactly. It may be good music but it's not important music.**

You've got a point there. From Stone Temple Pilots on down the line, they've got some good songs—give them credit—but their whole premise, the house they built, is ridiculous. They're not saying anything. I don't mean to sound like "I am important." I rip people off, too. People always say about our music, "Yeah, they're just Ministry songs." But if I started thinking, "Fuck, that's a good song. I should write one that sounds just like it," or "I should cut my hair like that, maybe then I'll be successful," I wouldn't have a soul.

**Do you think people can tell the difference between what's sincere and what's a pose?**

I'd like to think they can. But the English press gives me all this shit, "No one can be as depressed as this guy. He's full of shit. He's just cashing in." But I am that depressed! My head's just wrong. I'm not trying to be Mr. Tortured Artist Guy. I wish I could be more content with the situation I've got. It's a complicated situation, and I see contemporaries who are very happy in the situation they've got. But my head doesn't work the same way.

**But is being "content" something you should necessarily strive for?**

It's not about being content. It's about, What if everything you ever wished for in your life and never thought you'd get, you got? And it *still* sucked. That's the thing. I look at Oasis: dumb idiots just living life. You know, ignorance is bliss. And there's a truth to that. I guess I just don't want it.

**So do you ever feel you don't deserve to be a rock star?** I'll say one thing here. When Nine Inch Nails first got signed,

I didn't know how to do interviews. I really still don't. I talk too much and I say stupid things. At the time, my heroes were Jane's Addiction, among others, and I'm reading where Perry's a male prostitute and has this junkie lifestyle. And I'm like, I smoked pot when I was 18 once. I'm boring. I'm not this icon. I love Kiss for the same reason. Gene Simmons had a cow tongue grafted to his; that was the greatest shit. And I kind of made this pact with myself that I would just be honest. I am 31. I grew up in Pennsylvania. I wasn't a male prostitute. I'm not gay. My tongue is my own. It's not like a Marilyn Manson situation. I love Manson, I respect him. He's about showbiz and he knows what he wants to do. And I think he's a good kick in the ass of that conservative Pearl Jam pseudo-alternative integrity thing.

**How much of what's going on pop-wise do you view as competition?**

I watch MTV and I think it sucks and I think most videos are shitty. But I watch because I like knowing what's going on. I want to know that the last No Doubt video sucked so I don't do it myself. Since I'm aware of the business element of things, I get to feel a little competitive. For example, I like Beck now. But when he first came out, I felt that "urrrrrggghh," just purely from a he's-the-competition point of view. Not that we're doing the same thing. I felt stupid even feeling that. But I wanted to not like him. And then I was like, "Your shit's good." Everyone around me—everyone—says he's great, he's great. And I think that last record is great. But it's hard to not feel that sense of competition. It's a bullshit way to think. And that's what's disturbing about that whole idea of "You're

number one." Well, why? Because I'm better than him? I try not to think that way, but to be frank, there's a part of me that does feel that.

**Have you considered doing something completely different, like a record as Trent Reznor instead of Nine Inch Nails?**

I've thought about that. I'd really like to get into more film scoring. I think I'd be good at it. I also thought about doing a record of instrumental piano, like This Mortal Coil-type mood music, music you can put on when it's a rainy day. Or doing things like [the sounds on the CD-ROM game] Quake.

**Do you ever go to the game areas on the Internet under an alias to post messages asking for help when you're stuck in a game?**

Oh yeah, totally. I'm a cheater. And I'm a videogame addict. I could have written 15 more records in the amount of time I spent playing Doom.

**Do you ever worry that something or someone is going to cut short your life before you've said everything you have to say?**

Through my own self-destructiveness, or through a random act of violence?

**Either.**

There's the whole romantic notion of Ian Curtis, or for that matter Kurt Cobain, burning out before they've said what they've had to say. But I don't really think about it that much. I've got a long way to go in terms of what I want to accomplish. I've got a lot more I really want to say. I'd be sad if I were dead tomorrow, though [laughs]. ☺



