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SPIN

Ice Cube

**Sugarcubes, Rush
Matthew Sweet, PETA**

Teens With AIDS

Teddy Riley

**THE
INDUSTRIAL
REVOLUTION**

**Trent Reznor's Nine Inch Nails
Leads the Movement**

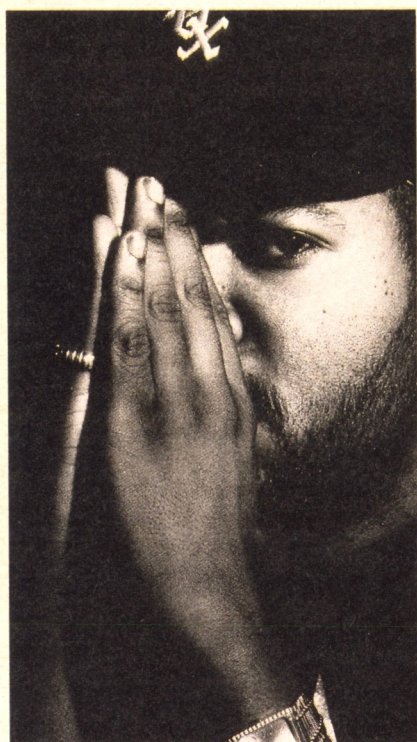
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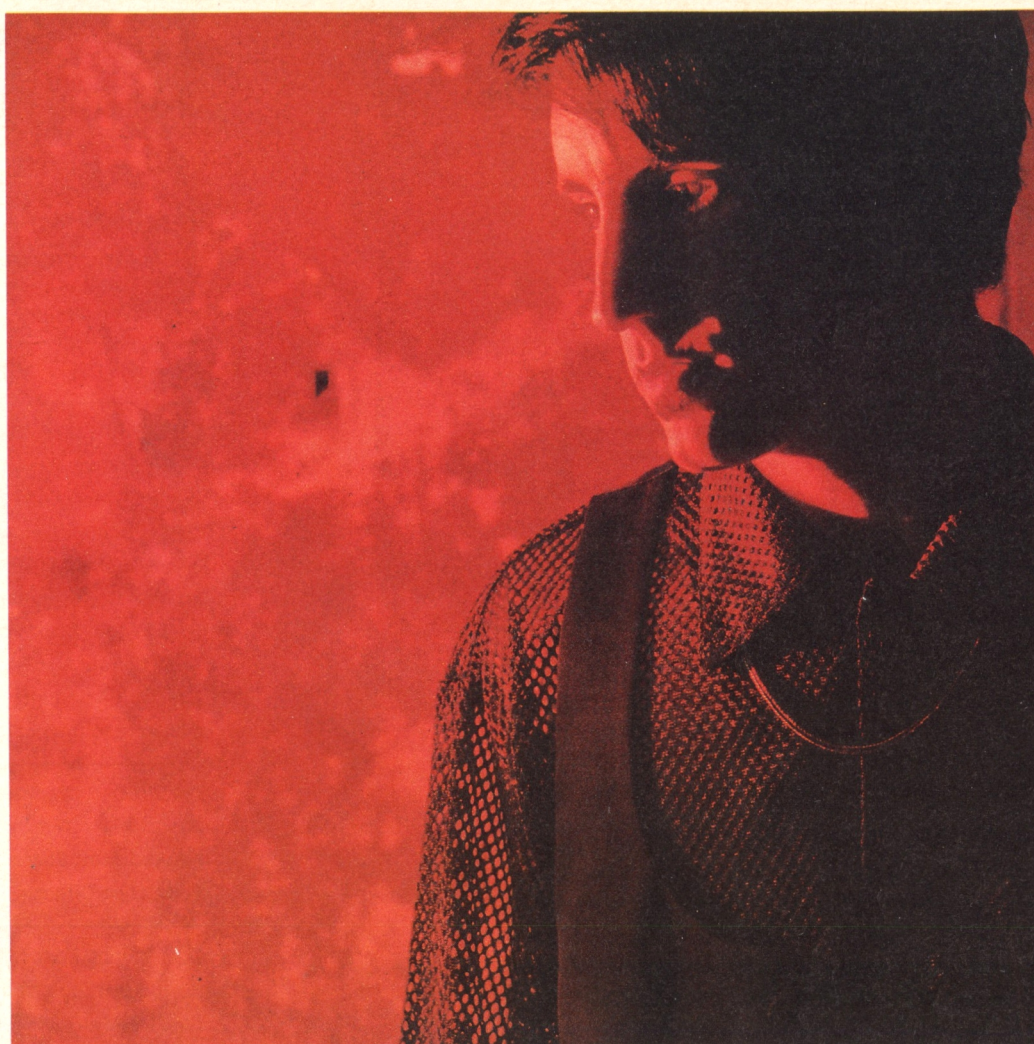
Industrial has arrived. With its unhinged rock'n'roll futurism, Trent Reznor's **Nine Inch Nails** blew away every other act in the Lollapalooza festival, including Jane's Addiction. By Jim Greer.



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Ice Cube called himself "nigga you love to hate"—who knew how prophetic that was? Cube's **Death Certificate** has managed to offend everyone. But it's too easy to dismiss it as pure hate. By Scott Poulson-Bryant.

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Cover and above photograph by Kevin Westenberg

New Orleans, city of institutionalized decay, seems at first an odd place for industrial music's leading light to call home. You'd think the practitioner of a noise so forward-looking, energetic, and technocentric would pick somewhere less nostalgia-bound, lazy, and decrepit to hang his computer cables. But driving around in Trent Reznor's decidedly high tech Sony 2600ZM (or whatever), past the gracefully crumbling verandas of the Garden District ("There's Anne Rice's house—and there's the carriage house where the Vampire Lestat lived") and on into the vibrant French Quarter, you get a sense of the town's dark, almost gothic appeal. And even though Reznor's not quite the self-obsessed, tormented-poet type he's at times been depicted as, this side of New Orleans suits him. There's a deeply warm, life-affirming quality to the city—surprising amid all that decay—which also finds an analog in Trent's character. As well as his music. Which is not something I came here expecting to find out.

But then, I'm not really sure what I did expect. I was looking for the hidden motor that drives the phenomenon of industrial music, which, however loosely (and inappropriately) defined, is currently threatening heavy metal and rap for musical dominance—and cultural relevance—in suburban neighborhoods across the country. It's not yet there, wherever there is, but incrementally and almost without notice in the mainstream media, industrial

How did the proponents of a critically despised genre keep their album on the charts for over a year and put a T-shirt on the back of every other Lollapaloozer? Trent Reznor, wild-eyed CEO of industrial superpower Nine Inch Nails, debriefs JIM GREER.

has become the music of choice for an increasingly disaffected stratum of middle-American youth. It's gone without notice partly because it's not an urban phenomenon, and partly because the genre has in the past been largely written off as worthless by mainstream critics like, well, like me.

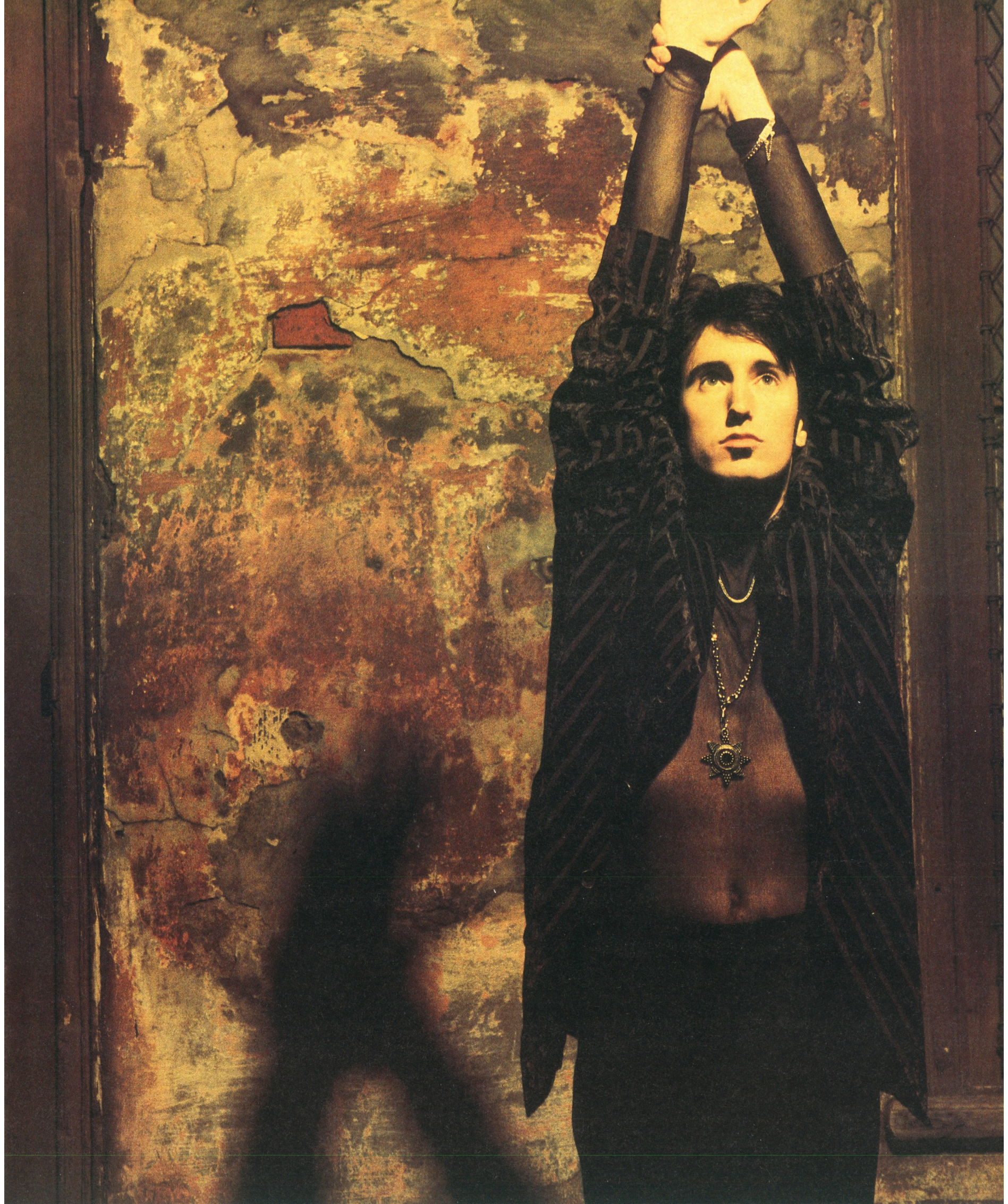
Which I guess was not a good idea, huh? To me it's always promising for any form of music when it becomes popular despite lack of critical attention, and that's precisely what's happened to industrial in general. And especially to Nine Inch Nails. Twenty-six-year-old

Reznor's one-man project (fleshed out onstage by hired guns) is the most

nine
inches
of

love

P H O T O G R A P H S B Y K E V I N W E S T E N B E R G



successful industrial act in the world right now. The band has one LP out, 1989's *Pretty Hate Machine*, which has currently sold somewhere on the order of half a million—astounding for a band on an independent label. But when *Pretty Hate Machine* came out, we didn't review it in SPIN. I'd never even seen the band play live until Lollapalooza, at which time I was formally converted to Naidom, or whatever they'll eventually call it. With their genuinely unhinged rock'n'roll futurism, NIN blew away every other act in the festival, including headliners Jane's Addiction. Older audience members were moved to awestruck comparisons with the Stooges or the early Who—the under-30s just realized this stuff rocked.

So you'd have to figure Reznor would have some insight into the process by which this happened. I mean, what kinds of people are buying his records, what type of person is into industrial music these days? Look at the way the moshers at Lollapalooza punched the air and shouted along with "Head like a hole / Black as your soul / I'd rather die than give you control!" It's the new heavy metal, isn't it?

"I see what you're saying," says Reznor thoughtfully, slowly guzzling a Bud, "and in some ways I agree that the buzz of this little subgenre is getting bigger. I think people look at Nine Inch Nails as the pop forefront of that—the doorway into the more legitimate or obscure industrial bands. But I don't think the genre as a whole is solidified enough; I don't think there're enough good industrial bands right now to start up a big thing. If I look at all the bands that influenced me

at the time while I was doing the record—like Ministry—they either don't exist or they mutated into something else. Which I think is cool, but it's far from what stimulated me into wanting to do this."

Any discussion of the music's shortcomings, though, is dependent on the individual's definition of the ambiguous term *industrial*.

"A lot of bands have realized the formula for industrial music: repetitive 16th-note bass lines, snarling vocals. 'Cool, we're there.'"

"Have you noticed that when you call a band *industrial* a lot of them will cringe?" asks Trent, grinning slyly.

Uh, yeah.

"Well, I don't mind the term applied to us, but I think the reason people cringe is what it connotes—Throbbing Gristle, Test Dept.—bands NIN has very little in common with. What is industrial, then? I'd basically define it as dance mu-

sic that's a bit harder, a bit tougher, definitely with a drum machine, maybe some distorted vocals. I was a fan of that stuff. I was a Wax Trax record buyer when I was making *Pretty Hate Machine*. I always liked stuff that was computer-based, where you can tie in the technology with music. It was a fresh, new thing that couldn't have happened before.

"And I still like it even though now it's become mainstream and you can buy a drum machine for a hundred bucks, and everybody in the world has a computer and sequencer. Because I think that there are still a lot of avenues that haven't been explored that are—I don't know how to say this—a way of doing this new thing that I'm into, and that obviously a lot of people are into.

"I mean, I'm really into old David Bowie stuff for what it was, I'm really into Led Zeppelin or whatever. But I'm not going to have a band that tries to sound like that because it's been done. I never liked the Beatles. If you're going to have a band that is guitar, bass, drum, and vocal, try to do something different with it instead of trying to sound like every other band that uses the same equipment and plays the same chords.

"I think my affiliation with so-called industrial bands now is, I like the energy. I always liked the fact that it was electronic, but it wasn't Thompson Twins. It wasn't where Devo went with it. It was something that was kind of cool."

GRANTED THAT THE SORT OF INDUSTRIAL MUSIC Nine Inch Nails produces isn't nearly the impersonal, dehumanized, microchip-groove

stuff that drives most industrial detractors back to their Creedence records, it bears enough superficial similarities to standard grade, Wax Trax—issue industrial that you can call it that without getting, like, shot. But it's certainly true that what was initially labeled "industrial"—the heavy, experimental, nondance-oriented work of party animals like Throbbing Gristle, Test Dept., and SPK—has mutated to the point where today, as Trent says, "If you ask an average concertgoer to name an industrial band, it won't be Throbbing Gristle. It'll be Ministry, Front 242, Meat Beat Manifesto, us." And even within these fairly narrow parameters, generalization can be dangerous. While a great deal of cross-pollination does seem to go on—members of one outfit forming a side project with those of another ("Hey guys, I brought my disc—let's jam!")—the frontiers of what is considered industrial are constantly being pushed.

The industrial scene is atomizing at a rate, and with a degree of innovation, not uncommon in an ascendant culture. By now there are countless groups who could conceivably be called industrial—anyone, really, who uses instruments Jimi Hendrix wouldn't recognize—and almost none who want to be. *Industrial* has become the kind of meaningless catch-all term that new wave once was; but the very process of diversification has broadened the appeal of the music and, if anything, strengthened its identity. "Any genre has to broaden itself and sort of bastardize into new forms if it's going to stay healthy," says Reznor.

So how, given all this rampant health, and the

now-too-big-to-ignore popular appeal, and the musical innovation involved, did the mainstream media manage to miss the train?

"I think there are several blows against it to start with," comments Reznor. "One is, electronic music in general has never been legitimate. I live that down every time we do a show. What the fuck is the problem? You get this mentality of, 'It's bad.' Well, on the other hand, a lot of electronic music *is* bad.

"For every band that I think has something to say, like Ministry, or Meat Beat Manifesto, there's twice as many that have realized the formula for industrial music: repetitive 16th-note bass lines, snarling vocals—usually unintelligible screaming about the horrible condition of the planet or some kind of doomsday message about how shitty things are. 'Cool, we're there.'

"Front Line Assembly is a textbook case of a band that—I can't listen to a fucking song, let alone an album. Just monotonous, boring, uninspired bullshit. And they're far more traditional and far more exemplary of 'industrial' than NIN is."

Another reason for the lack of mainstream recognition is probably the makeup of industrial's audience. The worship of this music takes place far from the temples of the media, and therefore, as far as those temples' keepers are concerned, its disciples might as well not exist.

"Yeah," concurs Reznor, "oddly enough our popularity doesn't revolve around urban centers. One of our biggest areas is Salt Lake City. Who the fuck would think anybody's out there? We're like Bon Jovi in Salt Lake City.

"My theory on that whole thing, and I could be completely wrong, is that when you take an area like Salt Lake City or Tulsa or someplace out in the middle of nowhere, I've found the people I've met there to be more truly weird than anyone I've met in New York or L.A. or San Francisco. Because there's nothing to do and they, it's—I think when they find some way to rebel they go full out at it, you know, because their Mormon parents or whatever the fuck the situation is, are stifling them. Isolationism, being nowhere—people get really weird. We've run into weird Devil-cult shit and everything else out there. Not anywhere else."

Um, "weird Devil-cult shit"?

"Well, it's weird when you play a show somewhere and there's a disproportionate number of people backstage talking about how they're witches. And that there's a cool place to go—'Hey, you guys want to go out tonight after the show?' 'Yeah, where?' 'Well, there's a great place. There's this old abandoned church that these satanic cults hang out at.' It's not, 'Let's go down to the bar.' It's like, 'Let's go out and slaughter a cow.' What the fuck? It's the last thing you're expecting.

"And they assume that you must be into that. I've got someone coming up to me saying, 'The promoter is telling everyone you're a warlock.' I think a lot of spare time breeds incredible weirdness. They're looking for some way to rebel. I don't know."

Is that what industrial music gives them?

"Well, yeah, I think because it's not legitimate, and by legitimate I mean SPIN and *Rolling Stone*

have not embraced it, so, 'This is cool.' "

So we're killing it right now.

"Perhaps. Maybe I've been the worst culprit in that. Taking it to a major tour, giving it out to the people and making it not their private little possession anymore."

ALMOST DIRECTLY AFTER LOLLAPALOOZA, Reznor took up new fan Axl Rose's offer to open for Guns N' Roses at a couple of stadium shows in Europe. The experience turned out to be "one in a long history of miscalculations I've made with this band," according to Reznor. The differences between traditional heavy metal audiences and the industrial audience were painfully spelled out for him on this sorry venture.

"People were just starting to hear of us over there 'cause our record just came out. Our American label did not license the music over there until about two years after it came out. I'd kind of gone into it, like, 'Well, we did Lollapalooza and that worked out okay and in the big picture it benefited us and, well, what's the difference?' Well, it was a *big* difference. It was the worst of situations. It was us, Skid Row, Guns N' Roses. I like Guns N' Roses for what they do. Skid Row, however, is the epitome of what I don't like about spandex rock. Poseur toughness, bullshit. I hate them.

"So we open up. First song, people are, like, 'Yeah, there's a band onstage,' and they're slowly realizing we're not Skid Row. Second song, 'Okay, these guys are not Skid Row and I *think* I hear a synthesizer.' Third song, 'We definitely hear a synthesizer—this is bullshit. These guys suck, they're faggots, let's kick their ass.' There is something about the feeling of standing in front of 65,000 people giving you the finger. . . . An intense terror took over. In a word, it sucks."

From there, things went rapidly downhill. . . .

"I decided just to make it the worst half hour of this crowd's life. The point when it actually became humorous was when I saw a sausage flying up onstage at the show in Germany. A link sausage. But we got off the stage with our lives. Another sad moment at that date was toward the end of the set I actually saw one poor fucker with a NIN shirt, holding it up. Seconds later, I just saw a scuffling and no more NIN shirt."

Maybe that's because they all wanted it.

"We did somehow sell eight T-shirts that night. Eight out of sixty-five thousand, that's not a bad ratio. It also made me realize that I'm not trying to be all things to all people."

But isn't Nine Inch Nails becoming more things to more people, regardless?

"Yeah, and a lot of the new fans I just can't relate to. And the people that you meet at shows tend to be ignorant. Every day you meet somebody there that's, like, 'Dude, man, I know what you're talking about. On "Down in It," you're talking about taking acid, dude, I feel exactly the same way!' It's, like, what am I doing? But I realize that those people are out there.

"The only thing that's disheartening about that

is that I know where this band is going and I know how much harder we're getting. When I put out *Pretty Hate Machine* I thought it was a pretty bold record at the time; I listen to it now and it seems really light. It seems real sterile. I've interpreted the songs a million times onstage and if I did that record now it would probably sound a lot different. But I didn't, and I just want to put it behind me. Now, I see a lot of our newest fans are attaching themselves to a side of NIN that doesn't exist anymore."

Someone suggested to me that the NIN phenomenon comes from Depeche Mode fans looking for something harder. Reznor has no truck with this glib theory, but he seems vaguely idealistic as to the roots of his band's powerful allure.

"I would like to think if you took a cross section of my fans and asked them why they like my music and you took a cross section of Skid Row fans and asked them why they liked their music, I'd like to think that my fans have much more integrity."

But where's the "integrity" in liking a band? Whether it's Color Me Badd or Slayer, surely you just like them because you like them, whatever the reasons.

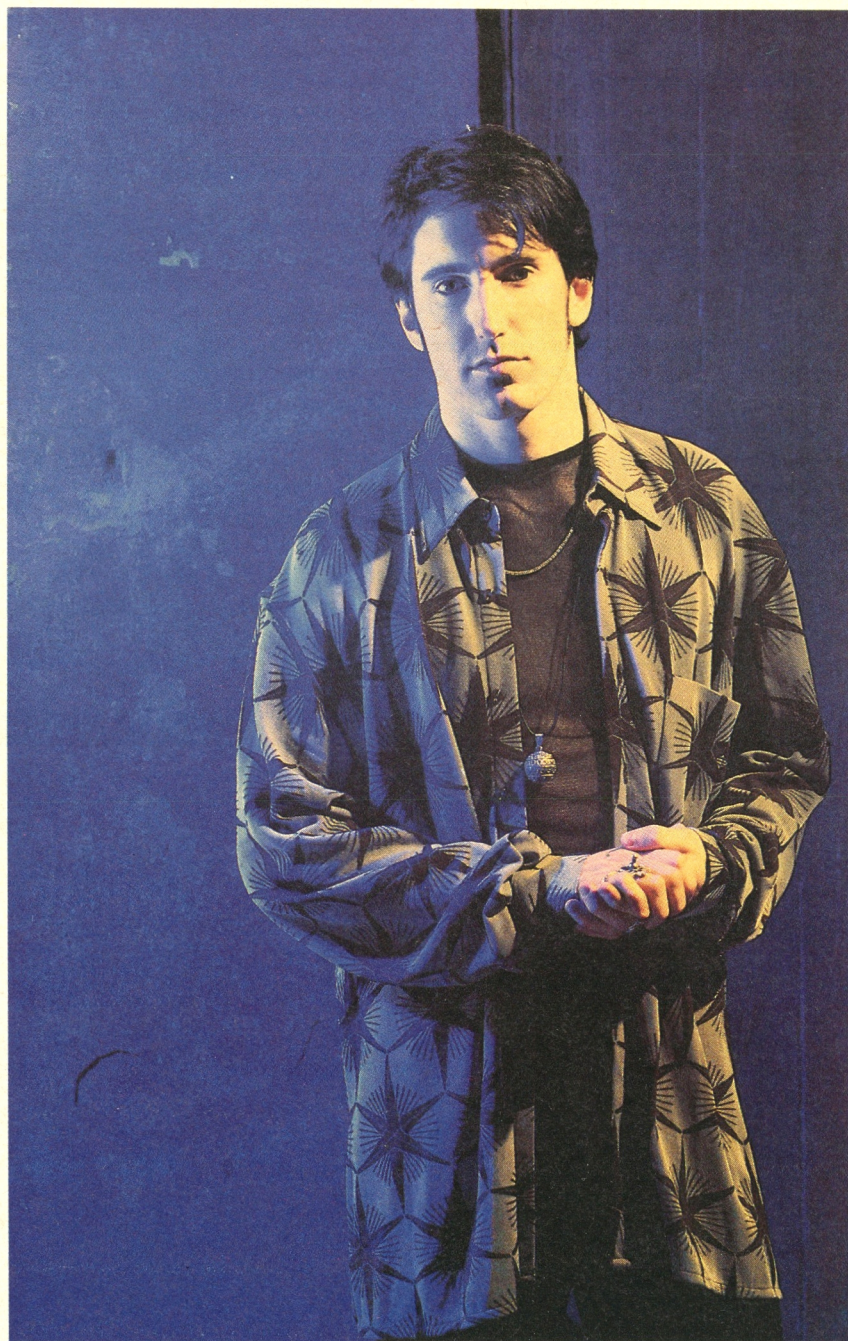
"I would rather that someone likes Nine Inch Nails because it connected with them in some way. 'I really like that song,' rather than 'You're so fuckin' pretty' or 'His hair is so nice.' I thought that when I looked at the G N' R audience. It was like, lowest common denominator. Every burn-out guy from high school was at that concert. They're wearing their Van Halen 1979 three-quarter-sleeve tour T-shirts, you know? They're still there, even in Germany, they're still smoking pot, you know. That's not anything against G N' R but that whole bulk of people, I tend to think their minds are so closed."

But as Nine Inch Nails gets more popular—you're moving into the mainstream—it must be appealing to some of those same kids. What about the music appeals to even a burn-out kid in a Van Halen T-shirt?

"I was one of them at one point. I know that mentality. I'm

sure a lot of people are into the band because it seems like it's the cool little trend to be into. Probably if you're suburban, Nine Inch Nails or that ilk of electronic music is cool to like, and it's safe. It's not fuckin' hardcore. It's accessible. There's something to grasp onto."

LATER THAT EVENING, SITTING IN ONE OF THE few quiet French Quarter bars to be found on a Saturday night, Trent and I discuss our mutual love for Queen ("I was much more affected



"I've had someone coming up to me saying, 'The promoter is telling everyone you're a warlock.' "

by Freddie Mercury's death than by John Lennon's," quoth Reznor), his new pal Rick Rubin, the indisputable fact that dogs are cooler than cats, and Nine Inch Nails' record company woes. There may be a new NIN record out by the fall of this year, but, well, relations with TVT Records are strained to say the least. Not surprising, since Trent claims that when he delivered *Pretty Hate*

Machine he waited two weeks before the company told him the record was a "complete abortion."

As I grew progressively wiser, or at least drunker (hell, he was buying), it occurred to me that Trent Reznor was a sweetheart of an ex-classic rocker from Cleveland who ended up with a hit record and a lot of unwanted critical analysis of his "place" in the industrial music "spectrum."

Ha ha, too bad for him. And, further, that was exactly why he was the man for the job as spokesman for the industrial revolution—his reluctance lent credence to his observations. Having come to this brilliant conclusion, Trent and I headed back to his car. We decided to climb a fence to get there and I ripped a big-as-frig hole in my new jeans. Ha ha, too bad for me.

INDUSTRIAL INDEX

In 1977, punk happened, and the world took notice. The attention was paid, however, as much to the spectacle caused by punk's antifashion statement as to its music and its "no future" sociopolitical rhetoric. But before, while, and after the punk rockers made headlines, another group of artists was creating a new sound closer to the dadaist concept of making art from the sensational screams and fevers of everyday life. While punk merely perverted the traditional rock'n'roll format of guitars, bass, and drums, this other group used tape loops, keyboards, and nontraditional instruments to produce sonic chaos rather than verses, bridges and choruses. Even more subversive was the fact that the first of these groups—among them, **Throbbing Gristle** and **Cabaret Voltaire**—didn't announce themselves by their haircuts or by using garbage liners as outerwear. They looked like the guy next door, of whom neighbors would say, "He was very polite."

The music that emerged from this group was dubbed *industrial*, as in "industrial music for industrial people," a phrase attributed to infamous San Francisco performance artist Monte Cazzaza. The bands reflected the places they called home: **Throbbing Gristle** was based in a section of East London characterized by decaying factories, **Cabaret Voltaire** (a name co-opted from a 1916 Dada theater group in Zurich) in industry-heavy Sheffield. The intention, like that of punk, was to disturb, to shock, to cause audiences to react in some way—just as long as they did react.

Industrial music's energy, like punk's, could not be sustained forever; even the bands that started it

have turned to more mainstream pursuits (relatively speaking). **Cabaret Voltaire** currently makes what is basically house music, as does TG founding member Genesis P-Orridge's **Psychic TV**. Many of the artists that caught the wave early on have either faded into obscurity or have turned to making more filmic music or even actual soundtracks. **Neubauten's** Blixa Bargeld, for example, has turned his energies toward creating film, theater, and dance scores; **SPK's** Graeme Revell has worked with Wim Wenders; **Cabaret Voltaire** did *Johnny YesNo* (soundtrack to Peter Care's film about a junkie); **Coil** (**Throbbing Gristle's** Peter Christopherson) recorded a soundtrack album for Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*, which was rejected and released by the band as *Unreleased Themes From Hellraiser*.

While the imprimatur of the first industrial artists is unmistakable, the current state of the art and its future is not easy to gauge. Some, such as **Einstürzende Neubauten** and **Test Dept.**, started by creating noise out of found objects and later on became more musical. Mainstays of the alternative charts such as **Ministry** and **Skinny Puppy** mutated out of the new wave of the early '80s. **Skinny Puppy's** distinctive sound evolved when a former member of a Vancouver synth-pop outfit was forever altered by a weird tape-exchange scheme called the Contact List for Electronic Music; wildly misperceived by its label as a potential Howard Jones, Al Jourgensen's **Ministry** revolted, ricocheting to the violent, hardcore-influenced end of the spectrum; during the last decade, the number of "post-industrial" bands increased exponentially, lured perhaps by the



Meat Beat Manifesto



Ministry



Throbbing Gristle



Skinny Puppy



Cabaret Voltaire

ease of music-by-technology or by the innate aggression they could express by abusing the same.

Ministry, like Belgian agit-prop outfit **Front 242**, was part of the Wax Trax brain drain, the series of bands tempted to major labels from Chicago's innovative indie. The commercial acceptance of industrial music, as suggested by the healthy record sales of groups like **Nine Inch Nails** (not to mention that outfit's runaway success on the Lollapalooza tour), may threaten an art form which has traditionally been nurtured far beneath the pop culture mainstream.

No form of art exists in a vacuum, and the industrial genre has been influenced by just about everything since **Cabaret Voltaire** started messing around with tape recorders back in 1973. CDs found in the "industrial" section of the local record store now incorporate elements as disparate as pop song formats (bands such as **Nine Inch Nails**, **Moev**, **Nitzer Ebb**, and **KMFDM**), rap and hip hop (**Meat Beat Manifesto**, the **Disposable Heroes of HipHoprisy**, and **Consolidated**), jazz (**MC 900 Foot Jesus** and **HipHoprisy** again), reggae and dub (**Gary Clail/On-U Sound System**), and new age (**Lustmord**, **Nocturnal Emissions**). Unbelievably, even disco now ranks as an influence in industrial circles (**My Life With the Thrill Kill Kult**). The tools of the trade are the same; what these groups choose to do with them has definitely become a matter of user discretion.

The same spirit haunts them all in some way, though, both in content and design. Almost all express some sort of protest against the human condition, and all use "found sounds" as illustration. It's essentially what the European artists had in mind at the beginning of century, brought to fruition at the end. Modern Dada, only a lot louder.

Karen Woods