

Interview: Trent Reznor / Jeff Price

Jeff Price: You've made this transition, right, I mean to me you've always created these tapestries of sound, and come up with ways to create music out of things that I didn't quite think would make music. And when you were doing that, did you ever think about your music being used to score literally a film, or score images? Or was it something that was always completely separate for you.

Trent Reznor: You know, I'd been interested in the idea of scoring a film, but I'd never really set aside time or made a real effort to try to get work that way. What's happened in the last few years is a direct result of David Fincher asking me if I'd do it. And it was flattering, because I'm a big fan of David as a filmmaker, and also as a person. It was an easy way to kind of dip my toe into it, and see, and he was very supportive and nurturing, because I didn't have any idea if I could actually do that or not.

I've become wary that, although I'd like to be great at everything I try to do, I've spent a lot more time working on a certain skill set. I like the idea of challenging myself, but at the same time I'd like to do that sometimes in a more private arena, where I may not fail in front of the world watching.

Once I took the job on for *The Social Network*, I realized that most of my composition comes from a visual place. I start thinking in terms of: I see something and I start to dress that vision with sound, when I'm writing a song. So, it ended up being not that foreign a process, really.

JP: So how did David find his way to you? How did David Fincher know you or your music, or was he just a fan?

TR: We've crossed paths a number of times. Through the nineties, he was kind of the video director you wished you could have the budget to get, and I eventually did do a video with him.

JP: Which video was it?

TR: "Only"

JP: I didn't know that.

TR: Yeah. It's pretty much all CG created video. But, [he] used music from me for the opening credits of *Se7en*. I'm not entirely sure how I got on his radar when *The Social Network* came up, but I think they were temping in some of the music from the *Ghosts* record, (the Nine Inch Nails *Ghosts* record.)

JP: So, when your song– I’m trying to remember: What was the song that was licensed from you for *Se7en*?

TR: It was a mix of “Closer” that plays over the really great opening credit sequence.

JP: The opening credit sequence to *Se7en*, by some, is seen as a seminal moment in film, because it sort of became the emergence of letting the opening credits stand as a body of work on its own.

TR: Yeah.

JP: You know? And when you finally saw this final [film], did you have any idea of what David was going to be doing with your music with the opening credits? Or did you finally see the thing and go, “Holy shit, this is really good?”

TR: No, it was that. when I got the call, “David Fincher would like to u-“ [interrupts himself] “Yes.” Even back then I respected him as a filmmaker, and *Se7en* was really him breaking into film. He’d done *Aliens III*, but he was a great video director, and I know he’s a smart guy, so it didn’t take any arm-twisting for me to give permission to use that track.

When I saw it though, it was like, “Holy shit this is amazing.” And I agree, it was one of those things that I think signified a real shift in culture; suddenly opening credits became something you look forward to, instead of had to endure.

JP: And so in that moment when you saw that trailer, or rather the rough cut of it, whatever it was for the first time, did it also alter the way you worked in creating music and sound? Did you think of or process things differently, thinking of possibilities that weren’t previously there in your head?

TR: I’d say this: When that same track – I mean the track that’s in *Se7en* – was a mix that I had my friends Coil do, it already felt re-contextualized. That mix of it already felt like an interpretation of my music. To see it in those opening credits, I just felt a charge of “Wow, I’m really flattered that I was able to be a part of this thing, and contribute something to it.”

Now, when we made the video for the proper version of “Closer” with Mark Romanek, that was an example of seeing visuals matched to music that I think actually made me think about the music differently, made the music sound better to me, because of the visual attached to it. Which in my experience is a very rare occurrence, especially when it’s music that you’ve made yourself. We’ve all seen videos to songs, particularly back in the nineties when everyone had to make a video, where the video made the song sound better, or vice versa. And it’s more often than not vice versa, where the video kind of cheapens the song, or attaches a visual that clutters up, potentially, the way you may have heard that song with some imagery that isn’t appropriate for you, or doesn’t feel right.

So, I can't say it was a huge revelation to me, thinking that about the opening credits of *Se7en*, or that affected me too much on that level, but it was a real moment of pride, to do that.

JP: Do you mind the moniker "industrial"? Because you're referred to as industrial music, rock music. I don't wanna throw out a term that you find offensive...

TR: I don't care. I mean I, I'm not the one holding that sign over my head, but I don't mind it being used, I understand the context, it's OK.

JP: Well to me, it's just music that moves me, but... So you, you're moving from creating an album, a body of work, a rock band, or an industrial band, whatever label you want to put onto it, into creating – not that there weren't already sonic soundscapes, but – music that was used in conjunction simultaneously with a moving image. And *Se7en* sounds like [it was] sort of the beginning of that. I'm always very interested [in] when you take someone of your talent... I'm assuming that for *Social Network* or for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* you got to see rough cuts of the film, I'd have to imagine.

TR: ...I've learned the way real composers do it, y'know, real guys that (when I say real,) do this for a living, and do it for a number of films. The typical process is that they will hold off until the film is near completion, then see the film and start working with, "OK, this scene needs something like this, and this scene needs something like that. Here's how long the scenes are, and here's how they fit together." With *The Social Network*, we came into the process after the film was shot. It was edited together, it was pretty complete feeling. It did revise for the next several months, but you could watch the film and it resembled what came out eventually.

Our strategy – Atticus Ross, my writing partner and I – the way we went about it is we thought "OK, our bluff's been called, we said we'd do this film. How do you do it?" And we saw a film with a bunch of fairly unlikeable people screwing each other over, sitting in rooms talking, court room scenes, etc. If it would've been *2001*, [which] was a blank canvas, and an interesting large space to be filled, where you could go off on a tangent and really feature the music? My gut says that would be easier, because it's closer in the approach to how I would write music for *Nine Inch Nails*. I've got a canvas, I've got a scene, let's fill that with sound.

Since *The Social Network* was not that movie, our strategy, Atticus and myself, was to sit and just generate some things *not* to pictures. We didn't take the movie home with us after that first meeting. We saw about 45 minutes of the film, I'd read the script, I knew the story. I spoke with David about what kinds of textures and sounds and guidelines he was looking for. He didn't want it to be an orchestra, for example. And then we just blindly, we spent about three weeks just writing, just from the gut.

I started to think what motions were involved there, what feelings, what scenarios. Not scene by scene, but in *The Social Network* I felt like here, here's a damaged guy that feels like he's got that great idea, and he's gotta pursue that idea, and he *has* to, at any expense, get that idea and bring it to fruition. And the price he pays for that is screwing over his best friend, and costing him relationships, and his awkwardness. And he's the kind of broken person that's not that [pauses] it's this very flawed character.

And I thought, "Hey, I can relate to a lot of the aspects of that." Not writing code, not the context, but the feelings and the sentiment, and the emotional ramifications of some of the decisions he made. And we just made music that felt like it could fit that world, set in that timeframe and setting.

Fincher loved the stuff, and then we just starting placing it in different scenes, and [would] see what worked where, and we ended up writing a lot more on top of that. But that approach felt pretty good. It felt like intuitively, we approached this from a very impressionistic, emotional place. And it worked.

So when we got to [*The Girl With the*] *Dragon Tattoo*, we essentially did the same sort of thing, but with a zero on the end; everything was ten times more in-depth. We had a lot more time, we had a lot longer film. We started working much earlier in the process. We were writing music before they were shooting scenes, and again, in this case we obviously didn't have picture because there wasn't any. We didn't even have a script. I read the book, I was familiar with the material. I was speaking with David, who was in Sweden at the time, and I could tell that the landscape of Sweden was kind of a character in the story – the isolation, and the coldness.

Again we just started churning out material and sending it along, and then as he was filming, he shoots in the day, the editors get it back in L.A. that night. We start mocking up scenes, and instead of reaching for temp music, we've given them, at that point, an hour and a half of music to start weaving right into the fabric of the film, and that approach ended up working out pretty well. We spent a hell of a lot more time on our end than I think, again, the typical sane composer spends. But I think we went into it knowing we were gonna go all out, and it was an interesting process.

JP: It's interesting too because I saw the original *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. I haven't seen the US version with Daniel Craig yet, that you scored. But, when you talk about flawed characters... They're definitely very different films, *The Social Network* vs. *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, yet both have protagonists that are deeply flawed yet with an incredible drive in them. I'm wondering if that's something that you latched onto to help you write, and that it underscores everything, or if that was really present there, and isn't the thing you latched onto, if that makes sense?

TR: Yeah, kinda. What I realize in recent years, I've kind of tried to be editorial about my own writing skill set – what I'm good at and what I'm not so good at. And I've focused in on some things that I don't feel I'm very good at. I'm not good at telling a story. I'm not a Paul McCartney, or a Tom Petty, or a Bruce Springsteen that can write a story – a Johnny Cash – about somebody else. I've never really tried it [publicly], and when I've tried it privately it feels disingenuous, like I'm [pauses] I don't know. I don't know how to do that.

I started writing by just opening up a journal and there were words that were truthful because they weren't meant to be lyrics, and that had a sense of integrity to it that I could tell felt real. And that became kind of a template for me to a) stay sane and get this out of my system, and b) I thought that taking some of this ugliness that was bottled up inside me and channeling it into something that had some degree of beauty to it at times, felt like "Wow, I've found my voice."

And bridging that skill set to something like trying to score a film, I find that if I can emotionally relate to something about it, I can turn the faucet on, and ideas come out. If I feel like I have skin in the game, if I feel like it's... if I'm a part of it, then I tend to find that I have to get out of the way and just let the ideas and music come out.

JP: So, who did you associate with, in both *The Social Network* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, that allowed that creativity to flow from you because you could associate?

TR: Well, I can't say that I sit down and consciously try to plot out "OK, am I relating to this that and the other?" but in the case of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*: here is someone who's kind of been ground up by the system, and abused, and has a real tough time relating to anyone else, and can't really trust to anyone else (Lisbeth, I'm referring to here). And [she] finds out how to survive on her own, and function in her own capacity, has something that she is good at, and perhaps tapping into her very investigative logical mind. But the world feels like she's an alien. She doesn't fit into it, she doesn't relate to it, she doesn't like it, she doesn't trust people. The people that she has trusted have wounded her in one way or another, whether it be her family, or whoever. In the case of this film, she takes a chance and starts to fall for somebody who doesn't feel the same about her that she feels about them. Those are things I can relate to. I'm not saying I'm that person, but there's aspects in there that resonate on a certain level with me.

And again – I think probably any artist does the same thing – I'm just explaining it. It doesn't cheapen it by thinking it through so much, but that's where it comes from. It's never the thought of, "Hey what would be a great, epic passage for this section that has sweeping horns, that really gets the audience to...[trails off]." It may end up being that, but it doesn't start with what's needed, it comes from what feels right, what my gut tells me feels like the right thing to come dress this scene, to setup the situation and possibly turn up some of the emotional content.

And I think in terms of *The Social Network* in particular, that film with different music feels like a very different film. And that really, I'm not saying that to blow my own horn here. I'm saying that because of what I learned in that process.

It's one thing to say, "Music has a big impact in a movie. It really manipulates how you feel." I understand that concept. But to see it firsthand, and to see a movie that I'd seen a few times now, without any music, transform into something that felt much darker, or weightier, or more vulnerable? It was really fascinating to witness firsthand and be a part of.

JP: Y'know, when you had that experience and you were watching a film, or the film you scored with Atticus, *The Social Network*, for the first time, and you saw the score in there, and the undertone you brought to it, and the emotionality you brought to it, was it – was there a scene that came across where the tone or emotion that came through was radically different than what you thought it would be? Or, rather, you were with somebody else who was watching it, and you were watching *them* watching the movie, and they were somehow reacting in a way that you thought was completely different than what you thought would come across?

TR: Yeah, absolutely, I have a very clear answer to that one. Jump back into what I was describing about the way we did *The Social Network*. We gave him [David Fincher] a bunch of music, right off the bat. And I said, "Let me know if any of this feel like it's in the right ballpark of what you were imagining, in terms of sound, aggressiveness, weirdness, whatever it might be. See if we're close or far." And I assumed that was one of four, five, six batches of music that we'd end up creating just to hone in on whatever it was that David was hearing. And that's something I should mention. Working with David Fincher, he is one of the smartest people I've ever met, and the most inspiring in the sense that he approached things in ways similar to how I would like to: very thought through, He's never really winging it. That's not to say he's not open to improvisation or things changing, but he has done his homework, and thought about material on a variety of different levels, and that became clear immediately. So when we walk into *The Social Network*, and it's not *2001*, or it's not a swords and sandals epic, where you can kind of hear what it probably should sound like. It was imperative that we got inside his head to find out: what was he hearing, you know? What was he seeing, because it could've gone any number of ways.

So, sending this first batch of music to him, he writes back and says, "For one once my life I really don't have anything bad to say, about anything." He didn't have any valuable critique other than, "This is excellent. I have a cut I have to show some people at the studio in about a week. I want you to come see it. And I'm gonna temp in this music throughout the film. Be prepared to not like it, just see what you think."

So we show up, in one of those theaters on Sony's lot, Atticus and I. And it's "Oh there's Brad Pitt coming, oh shit." And we sit down in a theater and play the movie, and for the first time I hear this track we call "Hand Covers Bruise" over the opening

title credits/title segment in *The Social Network*. And that's not what we would've put in there, that didn't feel like the obvious choice to us, 'cuz in the temp thing that we'd seen a few weeks ago, there was an Elvis Costello track in there.

And that's the scene where *The Social Network* opens up, with a fight between Zuckerberg and his girlfriend. And then he walks, rejected, across campus while the credits roll.

Now, I'd seen that as kind of uptempo, college rock jangly. You know, "Here we are at college." "Ah, OK, I understand that." But with this other piece dropped in there, suddenly the whole picture changes tone. There's a sense of vulnerability in there, there's an element of melancholy. Here's a grand, kind of majestic melody set in this weird setting – this guy walking across campus and it's quiet, and there's tension, and I thought it was genius. I got goosebumps, and I actually have goosebumps right now thinkin' about it. And it was one of those things I was so proud watching. "Wow, holy shit I didn't realize. OK, this is what Fincher's thinking. He's *not* just looking for background music. He wants the music to play a role in how we perceive these characters in this film." And he's willing to make it the forefront. He's willing to allow it to try something, and kind of go counterintuitive from what one would expect.

Then the real work began.

Then we went in to actually write certain pieces for certain places, but just that little nudge in the beginning, of showing his hand as to what he was wanting, and seeing how well what he had already done blindly fit in there, that was a great moment of inspiration, and that really set the tone for us, told us how to finish the film.

JP: So, to invert the question. It's a question about watching your music synchronize with a moving image, and creating an undertone, and an emotion and context around the visual you're seeing. What about the other way around? When somebody listens to your soundtrack without visuals? Have there been any fan exchanges or correspondence, or thoughts about that in ways that you hadn't anticipated? Where the standalone soundtrack without the visual image had an impact that you weren't expecting?

TR: Yeah, I mean, here's how we approached that. A couple things, 1) signing on to do a picture, immediately I approached it as, "Hey, we're in service to the picture. We're brought in, in a support role, to provide whatever's best for making the picture the best it can be." That means checking any sense of preciousness, or "don't touch that," or any ego, check it at the door. It's aided by the fact that I'm working with some of the best people making film today. Fincher, as well as the people he hires around him. You really get the sense of, "You're really on the double A team," and everybody's kinda upping the ante for everyone else. And that's a fun team to be on. And it's inspiring, 'cuz every time a cut comes back a little bit better than it was before, or somebody suggest something and that's [like] "Wow, I wouldn't have

thought of that before, shit that *was* better.” However, due to the way Atticus and I compose, when we’re writing together... I think when you listen to the typical soundtrack/score album, a lot of it feel like, “I’m listening to bits of the film without the picture.” And you might remember what happened in the film, and that kinda makes sense. There’s some great ones, obviously. A lot of it just feels like running off the movie without the dialogue track.

We never work that way. We always kind of write a theme as if it’s gonna be a two- to eight-minute piece of music. We flesh it out, where it has peaks and valleys, and it usually travels from one place and evolves into something else, or whatever. Then we condense that down to bits that fit into certain parts of the film. We might take an eight minute piece and use five seconds of it that works with a segment, or this one snippet of melody has a nice pass, so we might take a part out of there and we’ll use that for this scene. So, we have an advantage when we finish the film and sit down to the soundtrack record: Let’s use the full compositions now, and make something that hopefully is listenable, and could stand on its own as a full piece of music.

JP: I gotta be blunt, man. When *The Social Network Soundtrack* [came out], it was the first time in my life I did cross reference between Phillip Glass, Trent Reznor, and Atticus Ross. And I hope you take that as a compliment.

TR: Oh, absolutely.

JP: Because there’s some Phillip Glass I’m certainly not a fan of, but there’s other stuff, *koyaanisqatsi* in particular, where... You hit a real note, not to use a pun... For whatever it’s worth, as a fan, I was blown away by what you achieved.

TR: And the key on our end, was just really getting out of the way, and not over thinking it, y’know? I’ve found, as frustrating as it can be at times, for me the discipline is making the time to see if creativity is out there. Allowing “X” amount of time a day to leave that time uncluttered. And if you’re feeling motivated, or if by chance the antenna’s up and something’s coming in the receiver, you’re able to just capture it, and not overthink it, and not get too precious about it, and just see what happens.

JP: Did you find you had to expand your musical prowess, and start learning other instruments, or sequencers, or programming that you didn’t currently have?

TR: For *The Social Network* the timeframe was fairly tight, so we didn’t go off on elaborate tangents. There wasn’t a lot of time to go to school. I think what’s kind of interesting, and probably sparked the excitement was, there’s things that I wouldn’t have done if it was a Nine Inch Nails record, or a *Ghosts* record. There’s certain parameters that are appropriate to that film and [to] the kind of textures we wanted to use, and the approaches that were fun to investigate: some of it being eight-bitty type stuff, some of it being more eighties sequences, fifteen-note basslines and

whatnot, that to us references computers and video games and stuff that's not necessarily in the exact right era for Facebook. But I think to the viewer and the average age of the viewer it related to a sense of something that felt appropriate. That became inspirational.

In the case of ...*Dragon Tattoo*, like I mentioned earlier, we purposely set aside pretty much all of last year just to work on that film, and we could've done that in much less time. But what we found over the years is... I approach a record like *The Slip* for Nine Inch Nails where, it was in was inspired by the collapse of the music industry. And I don't mean the business side of it, but the end result in today's culture is generally people don't spend as much time with albums as they used to. You know, I spent years of my life listening to Pink Floyd's *The Wall* when I was however old I was, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, whatever. I didn't have access to that much music. Music was an investment. If I spent eight, ten dollars on an album I was gonna listen to it even if it sucked. I was going to listen it until I liked it, you know? I read the liner notes, I read the etching on the vinyl, on the inside ring. I lived with that material, it became part of me. And I don't mean just that, but the consumption of music was different. And today, where you've got an iPod that's filled with music you didn't pay for, and everybody's... it's just a different consumption model, between youtube and the internet and people sharing files. Competition for your attention; people spend less time with music. And hence, as an artist that spent years on records, it's somewhat defeating when you spend a year and a half on an album to get it just right, and it either leaks or comes out, and gets judged and dismissed in the first half a day, forgotten a week later.

That was a long setup for me saying – I thought it would be interesting to look at an album more like a magazine. Let's do it, not carelessly, but let's not look at it as the next thing that's my big statement for the next four years of my life. Here was a very intensive and creative six-to-eight weeks of my life I had, as an album. Here it is. It's free. That's what *The Slip* was. It's fun to do, it was interesting to see if it could be done. I'm proud of that record, it was fun to make. The self-imposed pressure was also matched with [the fact that] if it sucked I didn't have to put it out.

It was a fun process. Now compare that to *The Fragile*, where we spent two years writing and working on that album. And that was also a fun process, but when approaching something that has a lot of length to it, and time, we could go off on tangents, say "What if we don't put the mics where we normally do, but try something different? Or what if we played on a different instrument that we don't know how to play? Or what if we hired someone to come in to do this? Or...what if?"

When you have a broader scope, it tends to allow you to do those things which, they don't always work, but you learn something from it.

...*Dragon Tattoo*, and I'm boring myself with this long answer, that was an excuse to follow some of those trailheads. And in the process, we learned a lot about trying

new things, as opposed to *The Social Network*, which used and modified a skill set that we already had. [26:06]

JP: See, I'm waiting for the reemergence of the glockenspiel and didgeridoo, you know? I'm hoping you're the guy that can bring it to fruition, so...

Actually, is it alright if I transition to some unrelated-to-filmmaking stuff? If you'll allow me that luxury I'll be very interested. You chose as a very successful artist, to split ways with the Universal Music Group and Interscope Records.

TR: Yup.

JP: And I'm wondering, what drove that decision? I certainly have my own opinions, but I'm no artist, you are. You make culture, and the rest of us are the ones that are lucky enough to hear it and make it mean something to us, so: Why did you choose to leave the infrastructure and the machine that allowed you to get to the point that you're at where you could do the things that you're doing?

TR: Well [pauses], that time would've been about two thousand...eight-ish, somewhere in that neighborhood, and, the true reality of that situation was: the record deal that we had signed years and years before had escalating advances based on the current state of the industry when that was negotiated. Meanwhile, the industry has collapsed, and those advances didn't make any sense for the record label at that point. They were astronomical compared to what an expected return would be. We were kind of presented with the situation of, "Hey, if you wanna stay here, let's renegotiate something that's more realistic for us in terms of an advance, or, do it on your own."

Now, at that time in my life, it felt very much like, "OK. The record business is broken. The model is broken." I'd go through periods of having to look in the mirror and say, "Let's see. I just made an album I spent a year working on. I turned it over to the record label to get manufactured. It leaked, and I'm online, just boiling furious, at fans who're talking about how much they love this new album, that they just stole." And then I'd think, "Wait a minute. They're not standing outside my house, bootlegging copies out the back of their van, y'know, to make money. They're sharing their excitement about songs I've written, and music I've done. And they're excited about it. And I'm pissed off at 'em, because what? They didn't wait until a month from now, when they'd have to drive to a record shop (if they can find one,) to buy a piece of plastic they don't want, then rip it back to their computers, to...man, this sucks. Ok, something's not right." Or they can buy it from iTunes at a lower bit quality, which at that time was also copy protected, which I was strongly against.

It becomes very clear, if you can remove the emotion from the equation, that, OK. The delivery system is broken. And the relationship between fans and artists and record labels is also broken. I thought I was smart enough to get that right. What I

learned is it consumed... The following years coming up to the present, have been spent trying to experiment with different business models.

First and foremost, spending time paying attention to what consumers want. You know, it all sounds like market research and boring marketing-type crap, and it is, but it also became clear: nobody else has figured it out. And managers aren't gonna tell us what to do, and record labels, it's clear they don't know what to do. And the internet at large, their proposition that everything should just be free? That's great if you're a kid at home, it's not so great if you're a content provider that's thinking "OK, how am I supposed to keep doing this if everything is just free?" That's not right, in my opinion.

But nobody wants to be Metallica and, stand up and [say] "Hey, on the one hand look how rich I am. On the other hand hey man, you should be paying me, poor college kid." Nobody wants to be on that side of the argument, including them.

So, between putting out Saul Williams' record and experimenting with the pay-what-you-want kind of model, which led to pretty eye opening and kind of sad results, in my opinion, to rethinking how one makes money. If I'm gonna go on tour, and here's a concert ticket, I'm hoping you come see, you know what? I'll throw the record in with that, it'll all come into the same pot. Rethinking different ways to get your message out to people, and also trying to be consumer friendly. What do people want? They want stuff that's not copy protected. OK. They want to be able to share it with their friends? OK. They'd like higher quality digital files? OK. They'd like to feel like they're getting some sort of value for their money? I understand that. OK.

How do we make that all make sense? You know I've spent a lot – more time that I would like to spend in the last few years – trying to figure that out.

And, where I'm at right now is realizing that it's a tough road, and I think that we are in between business models. It felt clear to me that labels didn't know what they were doing back then. But I'll say, on the other hand: doing everything yourself? When we went independent, we went independent-independent. We didn't go, "Let's go with an indie label," which has the same business model, but can brag about being an independent rather than a major label, as if that means anything. We went direct from us. That's it. There is no label. The label's me and my manager, as loud as I can shout on twitter or anywhere else. And you realize the shortcomings of that, that you're only as loud as people that want to listen to you. It is helpful to have people supporting what you do, and getting the word out, and, y'know, I don't know what the cool record shop is in Prague. And therefore my record isn't in that store in Prague because I didn't know about it. I care about Prague, but I don't care enough to go to Prague to ask somebody what record shop, and then strike a deal with, you know what I mean. It's beyond the scope of what I want to personally do.

So, there's another long answer saying: I don't know. I'm not disenchanted by things. I think in a lot of ways it's the wild west right now, and it's wildly exciting, and it's interesting when something's been disrupted this greatly, the record business. There's limitless potential, but it also requires a lot of effort. I have to do a lot of things now that I didn't have to do back in the day, and-

JP: But you had to do different things back in the day.

TR: Well, there's comfort in knowing that my job is to be an artist, and that's it. Make music, someone else will figure out how to get it in the store, someone else will figure out how to get it on the radio if it's ever gonna get on the radio. I can worry about writing songs, working on my craft, being the best I can on tour, etc. I don't have to worry about, "How do I get someone in Italy to even know there's a record out?" The right distributor, the right this that and the other thing. I don't have to be thinking about, "What's the biggest retailer in Japan? And when a consumer goes into the store in Japan, will they at least know I have a record out? Or did I not blow the right guy," and all that kind of shit that comes with it. And keeping up with what's the social network of this month, and do we have a presence on X Y and Z, and that gets...you know what I mean. It's just not artistic work. And I would prefer to... every minute I'm doing that kind of shit, I'm not doing, I'm not working on my songwriting skills.

JP: I guess that it means you have to have the right kind of team that you trust, that will do their job well. Because if you're not educated in their space, than how do you know if they're actually doing what they're supposed to?

TR: And there are no experts in the new space. That's the point.

I mean, the record labels of yesteryear have a whole, or had, a whole staff of people that knew how to work radio, that knew how to work MTV, that had street teams that did whatever the fuck street teams did, and a lot of that stuff isn't relevant anymore. A lot of it now has shifted to online blogs and retail, and viral word of mouth stuff, and how do people learn about music. It felt to me like a lot of people at labels hadn't done that research, or were still trying to figure out how instant messaging worked, not realizing "Hey, the reason nobody's buying the plastic crap anymore is they're listening to it through different channels." You know?

JP: Yeah

TR: Everything, everything has shifted, everything has-

JP: You know, before we get off, because I've taken up a good chunk of your time here: I feel I'd be remiss without sharing an experience and getting your thoughts on it. Which is: As I pointed I'm not an artist. I just don't have the talent. And I do what I do, which is basically, I have a career because of people like you. You've given me one, and I recognize that. And along the way, I began to get educated in the way

songwriters are valued and treated and make their money. And I'll call it "unearthed," [I] unearthed what I thought was the most disgusting, disingenuous, morally corrupt sector of the music industry, which has to do with music publishing, and rights administration around songwriters.

And to me I was just aghast at watching the way other people's money was being literally stolen from them. And I have to admit, I come with a bias, but I'd be interested to get your perspective, because you're an artist, and a songwriter, and a performer. You've been able to make your money a variety of different ways. Things like ASCAP, BMI, SESAC in the United States bring you a lot of money through AM/FM radio, as an example. And here we are transitioning into a new digital world, where it isn't figured out yet but everything is trackable. And I'd like to get your opinion, if you're willing to offer it, on what you think this means for the songwriter, what do you think of the current system and what needs to be changed?

TR: Well, I think what you're doing on the publishing front is a great asset. And I wish you great success with that, because I think you and I share the same ideal. Which I'll say from my perspective: as I watched – and this isn't just to do with publishing but just in general, as an artist – I started my career in the late eighties, where the template was: sign on with a record label. That's your ticket to admission. You have to have distribution, they have it tied up – promotion, all the team in place. And then just try to work as hard as you can, and over time, what I was hearing when we were first getting signed was, by your third or fourth album if you get your audience, that's what we're aiming for, and we look at you as a Prince type character, with a career like The Cure, or Depeche Mode or bands that've been around for a long time and that will continue to be around. Ok, all right, I'm ready. I'm in for the long haul; I'm ready to do this.

Then you start to learn as you see contracts. Wow, whoever went along with this contract originally, it's not a very fair contract. Let's see, you as a record label lend me some money to make a record, and then I have to pay you back all that money. And after I pay it back, you own it forever. Wow. And then I get to make this little sliver on top of that, *if* I've recouped. But you get to control how much I spend on marketing and other things I have to pay you back for. So, wait a minute. I could sell this many records and still never recoup? And you do all the accounting? And then when you don't pay me, ever, then I have to spend twenty-five grand to audit you, for you to then tell me "Oh, yeah, we do owe you this much." That kinda sucks. And then [there's] the mysterious, purposefully convoluted and tangled world of publishing, and how confusing that is. And a lot of musicians, myself included, that just wanted to work on music, and hoped someone had figured that out.

And you realize – just what you said – some of the unfair business practices and precedence that's been established. And I'm not saying that no one should benefit from songs I write, or that I do all the work and I should make all the money. But I should make some money, and I should be able to clearly see where that money is

coming from, if I did all the work, essentially. I wrote the song, I came up with the idea.

But then when you see the industry start to collapse, which means you're kinda happy to see some of it collapse, but then you're sad because also my livelihood is in danger, and I think how am I going to support myself and a family in an industry where we're essentially making typewriters, you know? Nobody wants typewriters anymore. Everybody will read, and everyone still writes, but they don't use these clunky machines and, ah shit. OK.

I think the promise, and what I would hope more than anything, is that when we get to this new business model, whatever that is, on the record label side and also on the publishing side, [is] that somebody is strongly speaking up for artists' rights when that starts to get figured out. And that in an age of potential transparency, that the actual content creator has a seat at the table, and it's not ALL the things glomming on to it that are carving off their parts. Now, what have we seen happen? Is the iTunes payout model fair to artists? Not in my opinion. What I consider, from a consumer point of view, the next good business model, the next thing that makes sense, is if there were mass adoption of music subscription services, like Spotify. I think in an age of broadband connection being everywhere, everyone having powerful computers in their pockets, this sense of feeling- normal people feeling comfortable with the idea of the cloud, and their data's somewhere but it's secure, it's somewhere, and they have access to it, having all the music available in the world available to you at your fingertips, anywhere you want it all the time, that's pretty cool. That requires some education on the part of those companies, to help people to understand what that is. But I think that could make sense. But is it fair to the artist? Not really. Look at the checks you're getting paid from those services. It's not an inspiring amount, and it certainly doesn't replace lost revenue.

But I think what you're doing is a huge step in the right direction. On the publishing side of things, shining lights in those dark corners, and transparency, and the always-painful overhaul of when it's time to shift business models. When something becomes outdated, there's a lot of resistance to the painful realization that things have to change.

In my case several year ago, sitting around realizing "Hey, that kind of hazy dream I had, of sitting around getting checks for record royalties for the rest of my life? From work I did years ago?" You know, Eagles style, "Hey, Hotel California, another billion dollar check shows up." It's not gonna happen. Being able to make a sizeable amount of money from selling a record. It's not gonna happen anymore. That's a bitter pill to swallow. Music is free. I don't think it should be free, but music is free. I can right now search in Google for any music that there is, and find it free. And so can anyone else with above-rudimentary searching ability. That's a fact. That's what you're competing with.

I'm not saying it's right, but that's what it is. To not acknowledge that is being foolish. I think we're in a time of transition, and I really hope that when the dust settles, and it starts to become clear, "Hey, this makes sense," that someone has had the balls and the integrity to speak up for the side of the artist. Without the artist, as you said, there'd be a lot less jobs around the music industry. It'd be nice to see, for a change, that the artist is represented in that. To many people's surprise, not all artists are rich. Everyone that puts out a record isn't driving a Bentley and living a *Cribs* lifestyle, in fact that is far more mythology than it is fact. And artists are good people to have around, making stuff that can embellish people's lives. It would be nice to try to establish a new paradigm where there's a sustainable lifestyle. [42:08]

JP: So speaking of transitions, to wrap up here, what's the transition for Nine Inch Nails, How to Destroy Angels, and Trent Reznor?

TR: [jokes] With that said, I'm going to take my yacht and travel around the world.[laughs]

JP: To your island. [laughs.]

TR: [Laughs] What's next is we are putting the finishing touches on a How to Destroy Angels record – Atticus, Mariqueen, and myself. And that's been something we've been working on in the background for the last year and a half. We're proud of it, it's been a labor of love, we'll see what happens. What's nice about that is it's a different avenue of expression. I can play a different role, and I'm proud of what we've been working on for that. Beyond that, I haven't taken on any new film work, and I've kind of penciled this year in to write for Nine Inch Nails, to see what happens. No promises there, but coming out of two years sitting in a studio working just on film stuff, I'm ready to switch it up a little bit.

JP: Where does the Academy Award sit? Do you literally have it-

TR: I'm wearing it right now, I've got a special necklace. [laughs]

JP: [laughs]

TR: I've got a traditional fireplace mantle where it sits next to a Golden Globe, and I'm proud of that.

JP: I've gotta say, that was one of the more exciting moments for me. I hope you don't mind my vicariously living through you, but-

TR: It's what I'm here for-

JP: Well thank you, because without you, I mean I'm already a geek but, your name being called out of that envelope? I mean never, and forgive me for saying this, never

in my life would I have thought Trent Reznor would be standing up, in a tuxedo by the way, being handed an Oscar for his music. Yours and Atticus's music.

TR: It was weird for me, believe me. It was a great moment. I found it very flattering, and I was grateful.

JP: Well I'm grateful for having the opportunity to speak with you. Really appreciate it, thank you very much. Is there anything I've left out? That I should ask you, that I haven't?

TR: Not that comes to mind. I appreciate the interview. Thanks for the service that you created, I think it's great.

JP: You're welcome, thank you for using it. We can just keep this going back and forth all day.

TR: [laughs]