



Outside Vichny Volachek, Russia. September 17, 2006.

Trance  
Michael Eddy

One night in a small roadhouse cum hostess bar in rural Russia, the Russian artist Stas Shuripa broke it all down for me: real techno no longer exists. Cheeks flushed, having just been shimmying on the tiny mirrored dance floor to Russian synthesizer pop, I listened attentively. At one point, shortly after being born, it had died; Kraftwerk etc. What remained were two irreconcilable strains, representative of the crisis of our relationship to music; on the one hand there was *House* – a category that expropriated huge territories of sound, founded on and exemplifying irony, and potentially summarized by the subheading *music for the managerial class*. House deploys a range of tactics that places the individual into an identifying role with the group, and fills them with false optimism: happy and affirmative melodies, easily mastered rhythms, and drum

crescendos and climaxes concertedly provide the dancers with a controlled narrative of triumph to act out. The fist and groin pumping, the foot-tapping and corny-ecstatic smiles are caricatures of dance, symptoms of the comedic distance and lack of conviction required to achieve success in the offices and boutiques of the Now.

*Trance*, the dark cousin of the hegemonic House, on the other hand offers no such vacuous promises; in fact, vacuity is precisely its sole promise. Its message is negative, alienating the listener from the group in such a way as to be drawn into a downward infinite spiral, totally alone. Its relentless, unattainable rhythm, which is seamless and without exits, is occasionally punctuated by voices, but rather than being arms of salvation extended to help the listener from their deepening pit, the voices – mechanical, sardonic, quotations from video games such as *Mortal Kombat* (“*Killl hiiim!*”) – seem designed to facilitate one’s descent, to push one from the ledge. The ultimate scenario for this personal voyage is in the forests outside of Moscow, on lots of drugs. Stas grinned through his sparse Eastern beard, relishing a memory that couldn’t possibly be put into words. I pictured a dark scene of writhing zombies. These measures ensured *Trance*’s position among the only authentic musical experiences, along with the rituals of primitives.

I was blown away by these revelations. I could no longer force myself to get back on the dance floor; it looked suddenly distant, quaint and too petite for the breadth of my newfound passions; the imagination reeled. I tried to relate to my friends back in the West the gravity of the esoteric findings; they didn’t convert. Having returned home transformed, searches for this sweet poison on the internet would turn up only hokey videos of tanned ravers in which I was sure I could identify the beat fuelling their prancing as House music. I found approximations in Dutch Gabber, but when I showed my sister on her computer she forced me to turn it off, repulsed by what she detected as white supremacist undertones. She yanked the telephone cord from the laptop. It was later, on the low stage of a karaoke sports bar in my hometown of Halifax, that I had an out-of-body experience while singing Linda Ronstadt’s “Different Drum”; hitting me like the backhand of the sublime, I realized I was utterly alone, inconceivably far away from the Muscovite woods; marooned in the midst of an ironic civilization.