



put the white capsule on

AS THE TRAPPINGS OF THE PSYCHEDELIC ERA RESURFACE IN CLOTHES AND MUSIC, THE REAL FORCE BEHIND THOSE TIMES IS LEFT UNTAPPED: THE DESIRE FOR A TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS. BUT THERE IS A DRUG WHOSE ADVOCATES CLAIM WILL DO JUST THAT. IN ONE US CITY, 30,000 DOSES OF IT WERE BEING TAKEN EACH MONTH. THEN IT BECAME ILLEGAL...

A YUPPIE WAY OF KNOWLEDGE



ESTASY

my tongue and swallowed,  
hoping to God the source  
was reliable; that this really  
was it and not some new  
amalgamation of

PCP or even LSD. My friend took her capsule and we stood looking at each other. What now? She told me it would take about half an hour

to come on. With apprehension mounting, we decided to walk over to a nearby park; the trees and the sunshine might help me feel more at ease.

"Some time later I looked at my watch. Forty minutes had passed. I looked at my friend. Was she any different? Could I see into her soul as had been promised. Was I feeling great empathy and love?

"No, in fact we were having an argument. Tired of the park, she wanted us to go home, while I preferred to stay there with the hilltop view of London. There seemed to be no resolution. My heart was beating a little faster, but I put it down to anxiety.

"Another twenty minutes passed. Still nothing. Perhaps the drug was just too subtle for me. Disappointed, I gave in to her wish to go home. We started down the hill. But by the time we reached the bottom I'd forgotten I was angry with her. In fact I'd forgotten how to be angry. We were having a new conversation, examining our goals in life. What had we done to far? Had we really followed those vows of adolescence? Did either of us know what it was like to be close to another human being? For the first time in years I confessed my childhood yearnings to become a marine; she told me she'd wanted to marry Woody Allen. Defences were dropping at a rate it normally took people months to achieve. Suddenly I knew I could trust her with my closest secrets. . . . strange because not half an hour before I wouldn't have cared if I never saw her again in my life. I told her this and we both laughed.

"By the time we arrived back at the flat I noticed my heartbeat was stronger, but now I also seemed to possess an extraordinary mental calm, as if everything were on a very clean

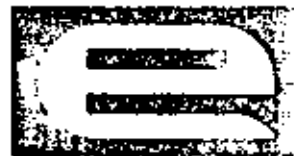
microscope slide. I viewed life out of a kind of benign fearlessness, but unlike the stronger sensations of heroin, I still wanted to talk, move around, be with people. Also it lacked the estroverted rush of cocaine. I was feeling good but without the superlatives, without the mystic euphoria. There was no distortion of the senses or hallucinatory tinge, as with, say, mushrooms. Rather a kind of winter's night, mugs-of-Horlicks feeling. It reminded me of someone's descriptions of MDMA as 'the bug drug.'

MDMA, ADAM, ESSENCE, XTC or Ecstasy as it is also known, has been described in other ways. "A brief, fleeting moment of sanity," according to Dr. Claude Naranjo. Dr. Rick Ingraham said it will "heal fear". More often it is claimed the drug will break down the barriers between therapist and patient, parent and child, lover and lover, stranger and stranger. But if it has inspired this kind of testimonial, it has also provoked equally strong warnings.

The unnamed Londoner's experience continued for another two or so hours before the symptoms faded. Afterwards he said he felt slightly fatigued, experienced minor difficulty in falling asleep, but otherwise had no untoward side effects.

There can be little doubt this drug is now with us here in the UK, arriving from across the Atlantic every week via 747, turning up in flats and nightclubs and parties as the latest product of American drug mythology. Although it has created a stir in the States, it is known here to only a few. To most its existence is largely rumour and misinformation. 'X-ing' is a term yet to be heard around the majority of British coffee tables.

But this is not the case down at The Ranch, a gay bar in Dallas, Texas. In June this year you could have walked in and bought Ecstasy, or "E" over the counter. It would have cost \$20 plus the \$1.25 sales tax. Nobody would have raised an eyebrow. You could charge it



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E C S I A S Y

to all major credit cards. If you had a 'coupon' you could even have got \$5 off. It's also just possible that outside, someone would have approached you with a leaflet proclaiming "Ecstasy. Everything looks wonderful when you're young and on drugs". Or if you looked the popular type perhaps a different leaflet: "Flight Instructions for a friend using X-T-C."

Ecstasy, it seemed, was everywhere. The TV networks, magazines and newspapers were all running stories on "The new drug they call Ecstasy". "LSD without fireworks". "The choice of Yuppie-dom". Soap operas like NBC's *Another World* were starting to include it in their scripts. T-shirts and bumper stickers began to appear with the warning: "Don't get married for six weeks after XTC!"

Why? Because it would appear America has discovered its 'Drug of the Eighties', according to Timothy Leary, lapsed psychedelic prophet and Harvard doctor. His drug of the Sixties, LSD, is now receding into the twilight in America, back into the repertoire of psychotherapists, and this phrase coined by him in a recent article has been cropping up on television screens and street corners across the nation. It will be remembered that it was Timothy Leary who in 1963 set in motion a 'new consciousness' saying "Acid is ecstasy, ecstasy is good for you". Now, over a generation and quite a few false chemical hopes later, one can almost hear the strains of longing for that innocent euphoria in the new name of MDMA.

WHATEVER IT TELLS us of the times, its users generally agree MDMA is not "ecstasy". It can make you feel very close and empathetic — you might feel like hugging your friends — but the affection it inspires is unlikely to send anyone into the frenzied raptures common in the Haight/Ashbury district in 1967. Ecstasy is a misleading name; the drug is so called more for reasons of promotion than revolution. Yet unlike PCP's party tag as 'the Peace Pill', it fortunately tends to overstate rather than understate. Like so many brand names, it represents what people want rather than what it is.

So what is it? Chemically speaking: 3, 4 Methylendioxyamphetaminine. A synthetic compound modified on a substance found in nutmeg and oil of sassafras, it is related to

both MDA and mescaline but is not a psychedelic, and its effects, though similar to MDA, are shorter lasting and rely on a different activator.

Any description of these effects would be best prefaced with Aldous Huxley's comment: "We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves." With this in mind, it can be said that MDA is a mild mood-enhancing drug, seemingly not physically addictive. Excess dosage can bring on the symptoms of speed or LSD. At these levels it can also quickly become toxic; worth bearing in mind since tolerance develops rapidly to the desirable effects.

"Personally I find it boring," said an anonymous member of Soho's club-land. "I used to do it when it first came out a few years ago, but now I find cocaine a better buzz... and it's cheaper."

He didn't have more to add, except that at £20 a dose, Ecstasy must be making somebody a lot of money. For him it flopped as a party drug; the effect was weak by comparison with other drugs and the phase passed quite quickly.

But Ecstasy does have one remarkable feature, and this alone may have made it into the drug of the Eighties. Up until July 1st of this year it was completely legal in the United States. An emergency ruling from the Drug Enforcement Agency, alarmed at the escalating recreational use, placed it on Schedule 1, in the same category as heroin, pending hearings and a final decision next year. It turns out that in Britain, as an amphetamine type, MDMA is already illegal, though only a class B drug. The penalties are the same as those for speed. So far, according to the Metropolitan Police, there have been no prosecutions.

MDMA WAS FIRST formulated in 1914 as an appetite suppressant by Merck and Co. in Germany. It was left on the laboratory shelf until the Fifties when the US army began their search for chemical aids in the battle against communism. Tested along with LSD, it was found to be more toxic but much less interesting. It failed to produce those memorable effects such as the weeping CIA agents turning for the Washington monument, nor the GIs raving about "unspeakable beauty".

Neither did it inspire such delirious plotting as the scheme to lace Fidel Castro's tea right before a 1960 television broadcast.

It seemed to have been forgotten, at least up to the mid Seventies. By then, the hysteria over LSD had faded and new-age chemists were turning their attentions to more subtle variations, or 'designs', of existing compounds. In a paper published in the *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* in 1976, Dr. Alexander Shulgin, a Bay Area pharmacologist, described the properties of MDMA, an MDA analog. It was a rare mention outside of scientific circles. At around the same time it started to be used in psychotherapy, but again publicity was stunted.

Why? Because researchers and therapists like Dr. Rick Ingraham and Dr. George Greer realised they were on to something. This drug was exceptional. It induced miraculous breakthroughs in therapy and could be relied on like no other to produce that vital and transforming factor in psychiatric sessions — honesty. And the insights would be remembered afterwards. Its proponents in the psychiatric field realised that if they played their cards right, they might not have their baby snatched away by the government, as happened before with LSD. But they also faced a problem. How to let word pass around to the right people?

It took until around 1981 for the word to reach the wrong people. The arrival of MDMA on the streets meant that someone had seen a way to make a financial killing. A new name was coined, Ecstasy. Distributor networks began to appear and soon catchphrases like "a safe psychedelic" began circulating around campuses, clubs and dinner parties. Demand grew, according to the DEA, from a nationwide usage of 1000 doses a month in 1975, to 30,000 plus a month for one major city alone in 1985. Drug manufacturers began receiving huge orders. Its appeal, according to writer Joe Klein, was that it offered "adventure without weirdness, transcendence without alienation, a Yippie way of knowledge". It was too good to be true.

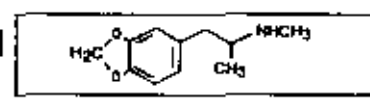
"I'VE HEARD A REPORT of someone locked in a foetal position for three days," said Dr. Ronald Siegel of UCLA School of Medicine,



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F C S T A S Y



"and regular accounts of poisoning symptoms, nausea, dizziness and jaw tension at the onset of MDMA experiences. I've also heard of people having loving, harmonious experiences. But so far all we have to go on with this drug is folklore, we don't have one published scientific study."

For Dr. Siegel, a DEA witness and researcher into the street use of drugs, the word 'scientific' is of great importance. He is adamant that this "potentially toxic" substance be kept out of the hands of unqualified users or non-medical therapists. He recalls the claims being made for cocaine as a non-addictive panacea as late as 1970 and points out that there are now an estimated 10 million US coke users, four million psychologically addicted. PCP (Angel Dust) too was greeted with enthusiasm at first.

"To my knowledge the scheduling came about from reports of clinical problems resulting from widespread abuse . . . and so far I've already heard of two documented cases of PCP showing up as MDMA on the streets."

Attempting to counter this official pessimism is MDMA's most vocal and enthusiastic supporter, Rick Doblin. As a long-time seeker into the mystical reaches of truth he feels better set to evaluate MDMA or 'Adam' as he prefers to call it. Why Adam? Because the myth of Adam's body being made up of all the races on earth recalls MDMA's sensations of universal warmth and communication.

As one might expect from such a campaigner, Doblin comes across as helpful and optimistic, maybe just a shade too optimistic. He single-handedly revived alternative architect Buckminster Fuller's Earth Metabolic Design Foundation for the cause of MDMA. He also contacted the United Nations, the FDA and Nancy Reagan's organisation, the National Federation of Parents for a Drug Free Youth, in the same open-handed spirit. They unfortunately didn't quite grasp his intent. The son of a physician who runs a drug clinic, he is trying to organise an entirely new pharmaceutical company. The aim is to fund the necessary testing to make MDMA a prescribable drug in the future.

"It's a false dichotomy the government is trying to make. Recreational use vs. therapeutic. Actually neither are bad, although it should never be used casually. They're afraid of the whole concept that people can have a worthwhile drug experience and not become addicted. Thus they blew up these University of Chicago MDA (not MDMA) experiments way out of proportion. It's just like the LSD story really, when they talked about chromosome damage. It just hasn't happened. There aren't thousands of kids walking around warped just because their parents took LSD. There are dozens of people here with a ten year history of using MDMA. We don't see any observable effects."

AS ECSTASY WAS hitting a peak earlier this year as the new party drug, the one everyone had to try, a group of clinicians and researchers gathered at the Esalen institute in Big Sur, California. Among them were several veteran researchers into psychoactive drugs and a number of psychiatrists who had been using MDMA in their practices for many years. On the fourth day of the meeting, Dr. George Greer directed a session in which 13 of those present took the drug, each monitored closely by another doctor.

Among those who read with interest the report of this meeting was the anthropologist Francis Huxley, nephew of Aldous, whose book *The Doors of Perception* and many experiments with mescaline helped shape both the psychedelic era and the Esalen institute itself. Though he didn't see himself as a spokesman, Francis Huxley felt the meeting brought attention back to the essence of the drug.

"Adam . . . is like a slow influx of warm vigour; very subtle, but suddenly you discover you're feeling remarkably well and normal. You could say functioning as you should . . . If you look at the mind you could say you have a sphere with the outside being all one's faculties. Adam doesn't affect the inside, it affects the outside, it works on all the instrumentation of the mind and sort of networks it together."

"Therapy is one of those dirty words that seems to cover just about everything, but if it can be used to help people find each other in a social mode . . . then that's as good a use as I can think of. If it ends up going totally

underground it will be rather sad because it will breed a paranoia which one doesn't want in any form of social intercourse."

Yet this will probably be its fate. Legislation is unlikely to dent the existing demand for the drug. Furthermore, Schedule I declares it to be "of no accepted medical use" thus denying it even to the therapists who have been working conscientiously with it for over a decade, and are now lobbying for milder classification. By reacting so strongly the DEA have simply promoted MDMA's connections downward into the underworld, where it will be badly made and heavily peddled.

"It's a shame that it's been criminalised because it could have taken its place in the pharmacopoeia," says the psychologist R.D. Laing. "I'm sure it's here to stay," he adds. "It's easy to manufacture . . ."

Moreover it has now acquired taboo to add to its growing mystique. And there *does* seem to be something compelling about the idea of such a drug, if not the thing itself. In all the accounts of the Ecstasy experience, you can hear an unusual undertone of unself-conscious advocacy.

"It made me feel how all of us would like to think we are anyway," says Laing. "It's the very opposite of acid. Nothing like a transcendental experience."

It also appears to have some very cunning merchandisers behind it. Several years ago, the first of the so-called 'designer drugs' appeared on the West Coast, a 'synthetic heroin' analogous to the pain-killer Fentanyl but slightly altered through chemical engineering to avoid illegality. Sold openly to junkies, its high strength caused many deaths before the formula was made illegal. Immediately, the designers made a new, slightly altered analog. The same techniques have created a companion for Adam, with a few minor chemical adjustments. She's called MDE or Eve.

And so Ecstasy just won't go away. Curiosity has spread its name across America, and doubtless many more will be drawn to it. As the Londoner at the start said, it can act as a reminder of a kind of honesty rarely found in human relations. Certainly, nobody needs a drug to tell them of this, and it may be that the message Adam brings is the reminder that ecstasy has always existed without it. ●