

TUNE IN. TURN ON. GO TO THE OFFICE LATE ON MONDAY.

BY P. J. O'ROURKE

EVERY GENERATION FINDS THE DRUG IT NEEDS. THE 1970s man, the corporate-level gear, got jolly on his dry martini. The sick hippie babbling in his pad had psychedelics to make it all mystic and smart. The wings of the Seventies had cocaine for their climb to the top. And the cold, selfish children of 1985 think Ecstasy will make them loved and loving. It's all per food. Drugs are a one-man birthday party. You don't get any presents you didn't bring. Personally, I haven't taken a new drug in fifteen years. The mature adult — balanced, reasonable, facing the world and the self with a steady eye — doesn't need drugs. Except for one of those marston every now and then, or three or five of them and a line of blow if he's going out dancing later, and some champagne and a joint and a fistful of Tylenol, Bloody Marys, Valium and . . . what the hell, who's got the Ecstasy?



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN GARDNER

The children of 1985 discover Ecstasy

Practically everybody, it turns out. "You have incredible insights," said a lawyer. "Everybody you're with, you just bond," said a jewelry designer. "Oh, gosh, one-see-see-see-see," said an off-Broadway actress. "Your defenses melt," said somebody else. I got stoned from a Manhattan businessman. He and I, a young woman of our acquaintance and a Texas journalist took it together.

Another half dozen people came by that night, and — here's a friendly point about the drug — I cannot tell you which, if any, of them were high. With one exception. My friend L. brought an earnest, tweedy dame who was flat uncomfortable seeing Wussy (byabout) blasted on drugs in early middle age. He was wearing a denim sport coat with wedges of Cheddar cheese in the shoulder pads and a pattern like bad TV reception. I definitely didn't bond to him and would have needed the sedatives of epoxy cement to do so. He kept looking like he was trying to remember the poison-course of phone number and left early.

Anyway, Ecstasy came in a lengthy, plain pill. It was supposed to be stuff from the pre-legal days but still looked, in this P.D. in street pharmacology, like it had been handmade on a home tinning machine. The dosage was . . . well, dope comes in just two dosages: too much and not enough. What we took fell in that general range — better than staying up late to watch David Letterman and not so good the police had to raid us.

But first you sit around for half an hour or forty-five minutes. Tingle. Tingle. There's a sort of resigned sigh in the brain. "Yes," you say to it, "I've been competing with your synapses again. Try to think of it as something natural, like anger or lust. These, too, cause chemical changes in the cerebral cortex and stem . . ."

"Oh, shut up," says Mr. Brain.
Then the Supreme Body Court starts deliberating: "Are we going to love this thing or have cardiac arrest? We want to sit, sleep, throw up, dance. Nope. Only kidding. None of those things, we just have a big feeling. Not euphoric exactly, not apathetic, just a great big good feeling."

"Can it," says Mr. Brain.
"Ahhh," says the Texas journalist.
"Hmrm," says the young woman.
I say, "Fuck! This isn't bad at all."
I had to get serious with the door licks, letting people in. They're a pretty complicated set of knobs and

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chains and other such technical devices, but not beyond the abilities of a bright fellow like myself welcoming all these good people into a swell place like mine.

Which is something of a drug-induced exaggeration. I mean, not about the people, they're perfectly good. But I have this pad — it's in New York, or pad — it's more like it, a big chunk of raw loft space looking as only New York raw loft space can look — like the planet Neptune decorated by wild hogs. Take LSD in here, and all bets are off. You'd wind up in Winter Park, Florida, begging geriatric Mom and Dad to take you to a Tough Love workshop. But on Ecstasy the dump started into party spot central, a big happy room where you could put your cigarettes out right on the floor and set your drink down anywhere and not leave glass rings on the Hepplewhite chifferoni. What a bizarre feeling to be palpably glad you don't have a Hepplewhite chifferoni. And I don't even know what a chifferoni is.

— I don't think much has been written about "Ecstasy music." But even the twerp in the sport coat was looking nice. Surely he was a fine person or hear, just uneasy because his Armani jacket couldn't get Channel 7. Our LP selections ran to early Ry Cooder and Best of Joan Baez — piped-in elevator melodies for the hip. Music's the food of love. But what's Musak the food of? Love drugs, I guess. Typical bachelor, I'd had one of a deplorable buffet of loose lasagna slices, graham crackers and jalapeño cheese. We didn't touch this, so we hadn't completely lost our senses. (A German pharmaceutical company originally patented Ecstasy as an appetite suppressant, and they had that right.) Still, there was a lot of misplaced admiration for my efforts. Admiration seemed to be running around unobstructed.

You get these waxes of buoyant pliancy. Also, sometimes, you get sick. The young woman did. She weighs a hundred pounds and took the same pill as the guys. We're six inches taller and none of us is going to be asked to pose for Calvin Klein underwear ads. About an hour after the drug took effect, she broke out in a cold sweat. Her heart raced. She felt nauseated. This lasted ten minutes. The rest of us just perspired, worked our jaws a bit, drank stacks of beer and pissed every three seconds.

We sat talking like teenagers — that is, volubly and at length about nothing that can be remembered — curled on our chairs, smiling, feeling wholesome and completely well. "Are you okay now?" I asked the young woman. "Sure," she said, "I feel great. I'm having a good time. I like being with these people. But" — she turned that eye of inexorable female preserver-of-the-species logic on me — "I always have a good time. I always like being with these people. So I'm not sure I get the point."

And that's it. That's all that happens. You feel real good.

What is this human need to make fun something else — profound, important, illegal? According to an overinformative article in *New York* magazine, Ecstasy is 3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamines, an opposite isomer (or mirror image) of the active molecule in some hallucinogens. Chemically, it's similar to amphetamine and, get this, the nasal decongestant Sudafed. I'd say the effect about equals the difference. To me it felt like a very sophisticated, extremely [Cont. on 176]

Ecstasy

(Cont. from 169) well-buffered speed. You get the glow without the gears (or the energy to write terms papers). Once any discomfort has passed, the only bad parts of the buzz are a total passion for cigarettes and that grimy feeling on the skin common to many drugs. There's no difficulty "maintaining." If Delta Force banged on your door, you'd be able to calmly explain that the PLO terrorists live upstairs in 3B, not at your house. Though you might also thank the commanding officer for being who he is and tell him his uniform is cute.

I suppose you could freak out if you really tried. In the *New York* magazine article, Dr. Ronald Siegel, a psychopharmacologist at UCLA, says, "We had a psychotherapist who took it, disappeared and started up a week later directing traffic." Finally found a meaningful career, I'd say.

On the other hand, there have been claims that Ecstasy provides "instant psychoanalysis." In a *Life* article, "The Trouble with Ecstasy," an unnamed psychologist says, "A five-hour session can be equivalent to five months of regular therapy. It could put people like me out of business." Probably a good idea to put people like him out of business, but what's that got to do with drugs?

And insights? People keep telling me they had insights. "real insights that really stick with you." But they never say what those insights were. Are we talking high-quality insights, like the second law of thermodynamics or the Pythagorean theorem? Or are we talking "I finally realized that, deep down inside, I'm me"? Nobody will say. Myself, I didn't come up with a unified field theory or anything.

To really enjoy drugs, you've got to want to get out of where you are. But there are some wheres that are harder to get out of than others. This is the drug-taking problem for adults. Teenage Wolcott is easy to escape. But what drug will get a grownup out of, for instance, debt?

If you think of your mind as an animal act (as good a metaphor as any, since football is known about how psychoactive drugs work in the brain), Ecstasy gets right to the cage and bangs the anxiety bars on the head with a lead pipe. It has the bug cats up on their foreheads, making like stuffed carnival prizes. And it brings on the adorable for terners in party hats who walk around on their hind legs, ride ponies and jump through hoops for about four hours.

Then it gradually slips away—and so did my party guests.

I slept fitfully, getting up every single hour to go to the bathroom. The

next day, the drug was still in my system. I felt okay but was a little disoriented, like I was in the next room and couldn't quite hear me.

It's not an aphrodisiac, at least not for me. But when you're crowding for a what is? I called the young woman and asked, for strictly scientific reasons (sort of), "Did you want to make love?"

"I wouldn't have minded," she said. On the second day, all effects were gone, but I was tired and depressed. X-log is pretty substantial for such a toy. Flip-out. A long run for a short slide. TURN IN TURN OUT GO TO THE OFFICE LATE ON MONDAY.

Man, I come from the days when drugs were drugs. We had dope where one coke would turn your hair long and your folks into raving maniacs at the dinner table. Some of that stuff, why, a single hit could transform a Catholic-school girl into Gomerah on all fours, snuff your ego like a light, rotate the tires on the Great Wheel of Being and make your eyes lay eggs. See God? Shit, you could get him down in the hot tub and wash his mouth out with herbal soap. And that was if you split the blotter paper four ways. As for insights, try yage and psilocybin mushrooms mixed with mescaline and Anchor Steam beer. Gautama Buddha has own bad self comes over to your house and writes

out the eighth path in lipstick on your bathroom mirror. We had drugs that would give you immortal life for up to thirty-six hours. And what about the time the name-assed Pezote Demon peeled the top of my head like an orange and vomited the Encyclopaedia Britannica into my empty skull? That's what we mean when we said high in the old days.

This Ecstasy is a lap-dog drug. "St. Joseph Baby Acid," said the Texas journalist. There's just enough psychic twinge to make you think you've done something besides a double Scotch on the rocks. And all that stuff about openness and deepening of affection is pretty silly. That's why it would be wrong for me to encourage you readers to try it. You're like a funeral to me. There's a link, a reciprocal union of loyalty and interdependence between writers and readers. I couldn't do anything to injure that basic human connection. I guess I've never had the nerve to say it before, but I love you. All of you. It's a feeling I need to communicate personally. I have the *Rolling Stone* subscription list, and I'm going to get in my car and drive around the country and give each of you a great big hug—just as soon as I call my Manhattan businessman friend and see if he's got any more of that dumb Ecstasy shit. ■

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