

DysCalcu1ia:

the social math of multiplicity

Dyscalculia (n):

1. innate difficulty in learning or comprehending mathematics.
2. the erroneous assumption that one always equals one.
3. the ignorance of, or resistance to accept, multiplicity of self.

Multiplicity (n):

the condition or experience of more than one independent self sharing the same physical body, as distinct from the multiple “social selves” or different “sides” of a non-multiple, or “singlet.” Popularized in psychiatry as the condition “Multiple Personality Disorder” (now updated to “Dissociative Identity Disorder”), there are nevertheless many people who experience this state outside of a psychiatric context.

by the Desired Conste11ation

(Here, let's wallow in singularity for a moment.)

- "When you think about it, we're all different people in different situations."
- "I think that's a useful way of looking at anybody."
- "We all have different moods."
- "You just gave different names to the different sides of your personality."
- "It's actually an extremely rare condition. You probably don't have it."
- "You're being avoidant. You don't want to take responsibility for your actions."
- "If what you're saying is true, you are dangerous and unstable."
- "You're too lucid for this to be true."
- "You act too much alike."
- "You act too differently."
- "What you're saying doesn't exist."

(There. I thought I'd get that out of the way for you at the start, in case you thought I hadn't heard your rebuttal before.)

the society of multiples. part one. (Ronin Ellis)

You can't even count. It's sad. Your dyscalculia of personhood assumes singularity of being from counting heads on torsos. Your condition, in a society of multiplicity, is a constant source of confusion. You constantly mistake strangers for friends, and are wary around friends, leaving them wondering if they've said something wrong or if you're in a strange mood. You've learned all your life to recognize people by their faces, their height and weight and shape. Now you're slowly relearning to recognize people by their rings and necklaces, their posture, their tone of voice, their driving habits, what they put in their coffee. It's all in the small cues.

So to fit in you explore your own multiple nature. Like most people you have your own inner complexities. You name your feeling of familial understanding when you feel like your mother's child. You name the wild carefree spirit you carry within you when you go out to the clubs. You name the dark, brooding side of yourself that sometimes just wants to avoid people and sit alone with a book. You carry distinct sets of jewellery, subdivide your wardrobe.

But they just look at you strangely. Inside, they know, it's all just you. One person, many facets. Like each of them within their groups, but alone between your ears. You start to get the sense that they pity you. Wherever you go, you are always alone.

excerpt from **Multiples** (Robert Silverberg)

"It bothers me that you aren't real, Judy."

She caught her breath. "What the hell do you mean by that?"

"You know what I mean," he said quietly, sadly. "Don't try to pretend any longer. There's no point in it."

It was like a jolt in the ribs. She turned away and was silent a long while, wondering what to say. Just when everything was going so well, just when she was beginning to believe she had carried off the masquerade successfully.

"So you know?" she asked timidly.

"Of course I know. I knew right away."

She was trembling. "How could you tell?"

"A thousand ways. When we switch, we change. The voice. The eyes. The muscular tensions. The grammatical habits. The brain waves, even. An evoked-potential test shows it. Flash a light in my eyes and I'll give off a certain brain-wave pattern, and Ned will give off another, and Chuck still another. You and Lisa and Cleo and Vixen would all be the same. Multiples aren't actors, Judy. Multiples are separate minds within the same brain. That's a matter of scientific fact. You were just acting. You were doing it very well, but you couldn't possibly have fooled me."

(for the rest of the story see:

<http://astraeasweb.net/plural/multiples-silverberg.html>)

size six shoes (Jeffrey Jacob Ellis)

it was time I wore size six shoes
back from school
and barefoot to school
over and over

and climbed trees like i never did
and could not do again
and be a child
who never was
with rays of sun heating the layers and layers
of skin on his face, his eyes
clenched shut against
its everywhere
-ness
and
hurting
-ness

i would have put my feet barefoot again in my own feet
on the long wet grass of the dewy lawn
and run in circles like you did
until i fell over
until i feel it
all over
me

could you share your toys with me
when we were children
again, now
building spaceships from legos
as our only possible

means of escape from that place.

we hung our feet over the edge
of the dry wooden deck again
into an ocean of soft long leaves

and ladybugs

rubbed our little hands on the smooth
surface of the weeping birch
until they glowed white
and we sat down
and wept
with
it



(self portrait sketch by Nathan, with lessons from Ronin)

discovery. (Ian Night)

One of the common objections to the idea of multiplicity is incredulity that someone could be multiple and not know it. In some rare cases, I've heard of groups who claim that they've always known. In most cases, there is a main fronter who experiences blackouts of the time the others spend on front, or in cases where there is shared memory they shrug off the strange experiences because multiplicity, seeming so rare and exotic, doesn't even occur to them as an explanation.

In my case, it's complicated. Before the realization came, I always knew I had a very strange sense of time and memory. For myself, memories were generally without a sense of personal context. I knew that certain events had happened to me, but there was no real sense that I was there for them. Recalling "real life" was on the same level as recalling a movie; I was distanced from it. In this context, I experienced what could be called blackouts, but I use the term "greyout." There's no sharply-defined sense of being in one place and then being somewhere else; the edges are always fuzzy, and since the memories on either side of the blackout didn't seem real anyways the missing sections didn't seem to matter. Occasionally, though, someone would comment on something from the missing time, and I would feel lost. I was described as acting or behaving in ways that seem alien to me. I would deny having said things others were sure they'd heard. I would often chock it up to my diagnosed bipolar disorder, which can cause people to act in very different ways at different times. Bipolar is also thought to affect memory. I have a lot of trouble remembering the past, and most of my childhood and adolescence are lost from me. Now, I'm not even sure I existed before about 2000.

I often experienced a strong sense of depersonalization, a form of dissociation where one feels distanced from themselves. People who experience this often report that they don't feel like a real person, that they're just a flat, bland, cardboard cutout with no real animation or life.

In retrospect, I realize how these elements kept me from realizing that I wasn't alone. But even then, there were moments of lucidity

and near-realization. It was around 2001 that I came to realize that there were two very different “aspects” to “my” personality, which I came to call Jon Night and Jon Day. Again, I thought of this as part of the bipolar; Jon Night was the depressed cycles, Jon Day the manic. It even occurred to me that this was almost like having multiple personalities, and thought of myself as being sort of “halfway” multiple. (I know now that some refer to this way of being as “median.”)

It took a crisis to finally blow things wide open. In 2007, I was married. My husband and I had moved away from family and friends, giving me a sense of independence and individuality that I hadn’t realized was lacking. The bipolar was finally under control with a steady regimen of mood stabilizers and antipsychotics, and I’d been to college and was holding down a professional job. But then, that autumn, things started to fall apart. I began to feel the familiar sense of the bipolar getting out of control. My marriage and work life started to suffer. I was experiencing rapid shifts in mood and attitude, and increasing memory problems. Finally I had to quit work and start getting medical benefits from employment insurance. I began tentatively planning out in my head what to do if things got too far. Then, one day, I realized that I could no longer account for my actions at any moment. I knew from experience that a suicide attempt could occur spontaneously at this point. Unlike many suicidal people, I rarely did any conscious planning, and sometimes would “find myself” already in the act.

The next month and a half is a blur. I checked myself in to the psych ward at the local hospital. Though I didn’t realize it at the time, it wasn’t just the bipolar. I was experiencing what in DID is known as rapid switching or revolving door syndrome- going back and forth between different idents at a very quick rate.

It was at this point that I decided for many reasons that my failing marriage was not worth trying to salvage. I didn’t know it at the time, but this was the right decision for another reason. This was a cue to the others that things would soon be safe for them.

They waited until the marriage was well and truly over in my mind. And then, through gentle pushing, they started to let me know.

And then, one day, sitting at my computer, I found myself reading

about multiples who didn't identify as the mainstream, pathological model. I read about things like co-running and co-fronting. And Jon Day said, "oh. That's just like us."

And then there was that moment- one of those rare moments when you know that your life has just changed irrevocably and permanently- and I found myself sitting next to Jon Day and fully, consciously realizing for the first time that this wasn't another side of myself. This was a fully independent other self.

We discovered, over the next few months, how it all worked. Most of the time, we operated on a level where we overlapped almost completely. Describing it is difficult. It's a mode of being that's so entirely interconnected, that we were for practical purposes, one entity. But at any time, either of us could take over completely while the other watched or simply left into a sort of sleep. It was this interconnectedness, this fuzziness, that had kept either of us from seeing the truth. Now recognizing each other as Jon Day and Jon Night, we were free to explore our differences and similarities. On most things we had the same tastes, attitudes, and beliefs. Our outlooks were different in some important ways. Day is more positive, spiritual, impulsive, and understanding. I'm more deliberate, serious, reflective, and sceptical. To avoid confusion between ourselves and the original Jon, we took on the names Ian Night and Nathan Day.

When operating interconnected, we wondered at one point, "what do we call ourself now? This combined self?" and the answer was quickly obvious. Even though we were capable of this complete overlap, underneath it all we were still two distinct people. There wasn't really any "combined self," we were simply operating with complete co-operation, as conjoined twins do.

Soon after, we started to discover the others, and the question of whether we were median or multiple was answered. The others did not operate in shared space; when they took over, they took over entirely. They couldn't operate in the same fuzziness that Day and I did. For me, becoming aware of the others was sometimes fascinating and sometimes terrifying. From time to time I would deny that the whole thing was real, and Nathan would patiently and carefully coax me back into dealing with it. Without him I would

probably still be in denial now. But as foreign as the others seemed, I couldn't deny Nathan. He was so immanent, and so familiar, and undeniably distinct. He helped me cope. He helped me make peace with it all.

In a short period of time, he and I discovered that we had feelings for each other, both romantic and erotic. It had been there all along, but without a context to understand it, it couldn't really go anywhere. But now, we began to fall in love. We cuddled, kissed, made love. We held hands in public- not body's-left-hand holding body's-right-hand, but a subjective sense of being two bodies walking next to each other hand in hand. It felt amazing. As a gay man, walking hand-in-hand in public is not just a display of affection but necessarily a political protest, and a risk. For the first time I knew what it felt like for heterosexuals, for their outward displays of love to be uncharged with any controversial political weight or risk of personal harm.

We lived, in secret, as a gay couple. We dated polyamorously, without our dates knowing that there were two of us there. We would compare notes; did you think he was a good kisser? Doesn't he have a sexy beard?

Over time, we spent less and less time in our combined state. Our fullest expressions of romance came best when both of us were present but separate. We would only combine for the novelty of it, no longer burdened by having to hide from each other. We became more different over time, too, as we had the chance to explore ourselves independently.

And then, things started to change. I don't really know what caused it. Ronin, who until then had been the "other" who fronted most (about 5% of the time), began to front more often. We encouraged this. Years of being cooped up in hiding had taken their toll on him, and finally recognizing him and letting him be free to act on his own was therapeutic for both him and myself. He began to make decisions for the group about finances and lifestyle. Over the course of a few months, he began fronting more than 50% of the time. As this happened, Nathan showed up less and less often. I didn't feel that he was upset with Ronin's increasing dominance; he encouraged it as much as I did. He simply seemed to be less and

less interested in the front.

At about the same time Ronin officially became the new main front, Nathan disappeared completely. He's still around, of course, in a coma-like state, waiting for his next time to be on front.

I've never missed anyone. With my memory problems and disconnected sense of time, not seeing someone for a year feels the same as not seeing them for five minutes. I rarely think about people who aren't physically around.

But I miss Nathan.



THE PROOF (Ronin Ellis)

When Ian and Nathan had freshly discovered their multiplicity, they were bewildered and scared. They turned to the online multiple communities seeking answers and support.

Someone whimsically suggested comfort food, namely chocolate pudding.

I ate their pudding, as a practical joke, and left a note saying THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING, BOYS.

I scrawled it in big exaggerated letters, because I knew that Ian would see that our handwriting is the same and chalk it up to proof that he's not actually multiple. Nevermind that I ate all of his pudding.

Why should my handwriting be different, anyways? Should I start from scratch and teach this brain how to write all over again, so that I can have my own handwriting? Why, when it's already there?

Later, he worked up the courage to go through his old journals and notebooks and found at least three completely distinct authors shown by different handwriting.

Not that it matters. Sometimes there is no proof that will ever be proof enough.

NOW TO SWITCH
TO MY OTHER
IDENTITY AS
SUPERMAN!

I AM STILL
REAL EVEN
IF YOU
REMEMBER

THANKS
FOR
THE RUDDING



Journal entry (April 26, 2008) (Ian Night)

Okay folks, I've got to level with you. I've got to nip this whole thing in the bud. I don't know what's been inspiring the histrionics lately, but this isn't for real. I haven't led anyone on intentionally, I've just been really confused lately. I am not multiple, just caught in some self-perpetuating delusion, and having periods of disassociation. Not the same thing, and it's time I made the distinctions clear for myself.

Thank you for all the support. I apologize for unintentionally misleading everyone. My heart goes out to those of you who actually struggle with this problem.

Journal entry (October 23, 2008) (Nathan Day)

Well, today it happened. Today was my appointment with the psychiatrist, who asked a lot of questions and made a lot of notes. I told him our story as best as I could piece it together, and what life is like for us. At the end he seemed fairly confident in giving us the Dissociative Identity Disorder as a second diagnosis to the Bipolar, and agreed that the Bipolar was most likely the cause.

I feel pretty good about this. I don't agree with how the psychiatric community looks at multiplicity, but I think they've got some of it right, at least as far as DID goes. I also think they're failing to see that DID is not the only form of multiplicity. It seems to be the best fit for us though. This doctor seemed to be fairly forward-thinking, though. He called the old form of integration-centred therapy a 'fantasy' (without dismissing it outright) which I agreed with. (I believe that integration to some degree is possible and even desirable for some, but not for us.) He suggested continuing to get to know all of the other members and learn to work co-operatively.

Came out to an old friend last night. He was very receptive and respectful. I was worried, because he's kind of a sceptic, but it turned out alright.

7th chance (Alice)

That is not the way that things went down at all.
That was not the answer. Not your call.
I'm in your bed wearing your hat again
Just wishing that it would rain.

Just wishing I could let go of you. Let go of the all of the all of you.

Turn out all of your pockets and sell your pants.
Box all of your books. Set fire to the bones of the bones of you.

Blame it all on second, third, and seventh chance.

But there's no room for these mistakes.

That was not for you to say. Not for you to take.

I'm writing in your journal again

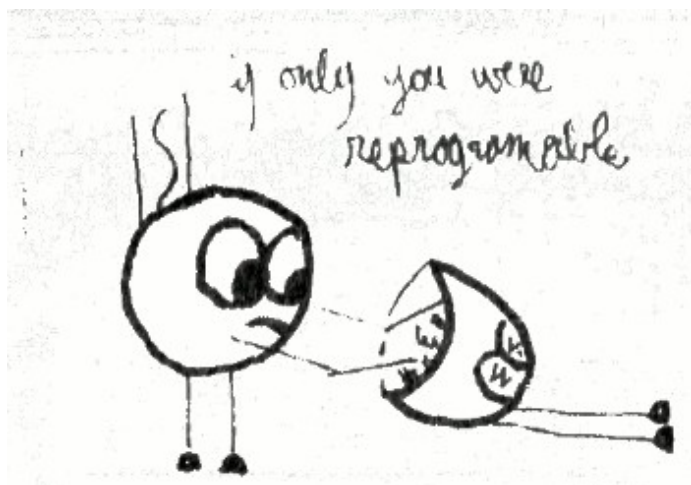
Just wishing I could feel pain.

And I'm wishing I could hate you. Hate the all in the all of you.

Turn up in your lowest of nightmares to assist

All of the demons who set fire to the bones of the bones of you.

Blame it all on punches that blame it all on fists.



The society of multiples. part two. (Ronin Ellis)

In a society of multiples, you find little in the entertainment media to identify with. Plots are convoluted, and relationships between characters complex and nuanced. Pacing is often bizarre, due to multiples' strange and varied sense of time. Scenes cut forward weeks or months without explanation. Singlets appear rarely; and are usually flat stock characters, often portrayed as psychotic, dangerous, pitiable, or deranged. You feel deeply uneasy whenever you see this sort of portrayal. Is this how they view you? No wonder they avoid you when they find out you're a singlet. No wonder they keep you away from their children.

You join a club for singlets; they keep their meetings on the down-low. Nobody is really sure how many there are in this city, because most keep to themselves and stay in the closet. Attendance is spotty. Eventually you go to the meetups less and less, as you realize that you don't really have anything in common with the others there besides your singular nature. You feel a little jealous of the multiples and their adaptive nature, their ability to find common interests between various members of different systems.

You eventually give up on the idea of dating, and live a very limited social life. People are sometimes very uncomfortable when they learn about you. The few that accept you still don't seem to really "get it."

At times, hopelessness sets in. Sometimes you wish for glue to hold you together, sometimes for scissors to take you apart.

mineField. part one. (Ronin Ellis)

I could lose another 50 pounds. Chemical straighten and dye my hair. Shave off all my chest hair. Put brown contacts in my eyes. Get rid of the beard. Even get plastic surgery to narrow my face, change my nose. It wouldn't matter. Even after the most extreme measures I would still look in the mirror and feel disgust and alienation. I'll still be over six feet tall and thirty years old and not me.

It's not my hair I'm messing with, not my chest I'm shaving. This is not my body, no matter how much I treat it like a mannequin and dress it up in my clothes.

I've always felt an empathy with transgendered people; no, I can't say I know what it's like to be you, but when I hear your stories I feel an understanding.

Transhumanism: the futurist belief/theory/hope that one day our technology will allow us to modify our bodies and minds to any extent we please, or even leave them for machine bodies or simply exist as pure thought.

I am a transhumanist because it's my only conceivable way out of this flesh cage. I have lived as a sardine in a can my entire life, and I often wonder what it's like to swim free and alone.

one Body = two Arms + two Legs + two Eyes + one Mouth +
two Ears + one Navel + ten Fingers = nothing that belongs to
me.

reactions (Ronin Ellis)

We have been fetishized, distanced, cut off, a subject of curiosity, a subject of scepticism, a subject of derision, depersonalized, and sometimes recognized and befriended.

- “You have to pick a single name for all of you to use, or I refuse to communicate with any of you.”
- “My love will cure you.”
- “I’m not saying you’re possessed, I’m saying you’re demonized.”
- “I think that’s amazing! I’m even more attracted to you now.”
- “Are you in therapy?”
- “I don’t ever want to be around you again.”
- “I love all of you.” “But you haven’t met all of us.” “But they’re all *you*.”
- “That’s so cool! Can I meet one of your alters?”

procedures for silence (Jeffrey Jacob Ellis)

there are procedures for silence.

begin: open all variables for observation,

close all externalities,

withdraw into each line,

line by line uncover and unravel

the meanings of words, the nuances of symbols,

the cases and styles of punctuation.

ignore the man at the door.

the hand too close to your face.

the meowing cat, the whining dog.

reshape the shapes you see in the dark,

bolt off from sight the light that creeps

beneath the door.

there is only now, and this:

the procedure.

continue silence until the need for silence

ends.

subjective/objective experiences. (Ronin Ellis)

Subjective experiences:

Since April of 2008 (when Nathan and Ian became selves-aware) there has not been a single moment of any day where any of us have asked, "who am I right now?" We have all experienced ourselves as distinct persons, regardless of mental state induced by intoxication, tiredness, antipsychotics, or social situation. Immediately upon waking (and even beforehand, during dreaming) we have been aware of who we are and who is on front.

Objective experiences:

Reactions have been mixed among those whom we've told. "I was sceptical at first, but when I met Ronin I was completely convinced. He is different in every way- posture, voice, attitude, everything. I don't understand what's going on, but you're definitely not faking." "I don't really see the difference between you and Ronin, other than a slight change in posture and mood. I know you think you're different, but I don't see it at all."

Among those we haven't told, though, many have been caught off guard by the differences. Prog is used to being told that he seems angry, withdrawn, upset, and distant (perceptions caused by a complete lack of affect- Prog is very emotionally neutral and focused on the present). I have gotten used to being asked if I have a cold (because of my nasal voice). In general (even before being selves-aware), we're used to comments like "you seem like such a completely different person today" and "how can you not remember our conversation from yesterday?" and "yes, we've already met. You don't remember me?"

mineField. part two. (Ronin Ellis)

There's very little that I actually own. I'm pretty sure I could fit all of it into a backpack with room to spare for a lunch. I have:

Four rings, two of which are currently in everyday use.

(Rings are very significant in our system; each of us is encouraged to have our own jewellery to identify us among those who know we're multiple and for our own sense of self. Ownership of property is an important part of feeling like a person, even if that idea's only culturally bound. For some of us, it also serves as an anchor in times of stress.)

A black leather wristband.

Three t-shirts.

A belt with a belt buckle.

A pair of jeans.

A notebook, which is open to the rest of the group to use.

Three paintings, two of which are currently in progress.

(Okay, maybe they wouldn't fit in the backpack.)

Well, that's it for physical items anyways. If you want to include attributes, I also have:

A surly disposition.

A strong dislike, distrust, and disgust of other people.

Creative talent.

Self-organization. I balance the finances for our group.

An asexual orientation.

Things I do not have:

Other selves. I don't own them, they have themselves. In fact, "your other selves" is an oxymoron; a self is a self-owned thing.

The things in my apartment. I've never really felt

ownership of any of it; I sleep in someone else's bed, use someone else's computer, eat off someone else's plates, often wear someone else's clothes. I usually refer to these things as "mine," but in actuality they belong either to someone else in our system or to the system as a whole. Our group owns the plates in the kitchen, so they might as well be "mine."

An ex-husband. I was never married. The thought of it is both hilarious and disgusting to me, as an asexual. I sometimes refer to him as "the ex-husband" and rarely "my ex-husband" - I only use this phrase around people who don't know we're multiple.

Parents. Thank God, what a headache that must be.

A body. I avoid looking in the mirror. When I shave, I focus only on the part of the cheek I'm shaving at the moment. I have my own self-image; 18 years old, black hair, brown eyes, scowly. Seeing someone else's face in the mirror is disconcerting.

I AM NOT YOUR REAL SON.

one Body = many Minds = one Birth Certificate = one Driver's
License = one Bank Account = not enough Hours in a Day =
one Life

Flash-Forward. (Ian Night)

In early 2010 I stepped down as the main front and Ronin took over. It wasn't really a conscious decision at first, but once we saw the trend starting we both decided to let it happen. I'd gotten to know Ronin enough to trust him with the responsibility of living our collective life. Actually, at that point in my life I felt like a failure; my marriage had ended, I'd come to hate the job I'd gone to college for, I felt lost trying to look after myself and somehow take responsibility for all of the people I now knew lived my life with me. Maybe it was time somebody else had a turn.

I wasn't active very much, for a while. I would pop in for a few hours here and there. Over time I spent less and less time on front. I helped out when Ronin was overstressed. I lent my hand in various small projects. Mostly I slept; my sense of time has always been very vague, so I didn't really have a sense of whether it was days or years that were slipping by. I do know that time passed. It wasn't like I went to sleep one moment and instantly awoke months later. I had a sense of outside events, like one remembers a dream, but no real connection to what was going on.

And then, I felt Ronin calling out. "I need you. I've got a problem here. Your family is coming to visit."

"What? Why? What's wrong?" The last time family members had shown up on short notice was to tell me that my grandfather had died.

"It's the body's birthday this week," he grumbled.

Of course they would come at the end of July. They couldn't know that my birthday was January first, or that Ronin's was

March seventeenth. To this day they still don't know their son is multiple.

I woke to find that my life was heading down a very different track now. I was fifty pounds lighter, clean-shaven, my finances were balanced to the penny, my plans of becoming a landscape designer were supplanted by plans of becoming an artist. I had a dead-end job for now in a convenience store. And my social life, helmed by the asexual, anti-social Ronin, was almost completely nonexistent.

I hardly recognized myself in the mirror.

Long ago, I was sceptical. Or probably just in denial. I doubted that I was multiple, that Ronin really existed. I thought it was just some act I was fooling myself with. It took me time to accept that Ronin was my "alter."

Now, things have changed. Now, I'm Ronin's alter.

'once i was owned' (Jeffrey Jacob Ellis)

once i was owned by the things that own me:
the trinkets of shape and mass
lying on the kitchen windowsill collecting dust,
my collections of
marbles, candles, light bulbs, lonely wires, bolts,
discarded shopping lists of strangers,
wants and needs unspecified: i own nothing that
does not own me:

it's tricky when
this detritus claims its own providers:
gives names to the unnamed, who live
in shadows, crannies, drains,
forever lurking in the corners of my i.

feet that sink into shoes someone else bought-
hands that refuse all gloves and draw themselves into
the arms of coats i do not own.
i live in someone else's waking life:
forgiving their debts, erasing
the footprints of their trespassing,
resolving their irresolvable past.

“oh, just like in that show...” (Ronin Ellis)

“Oh, so you’re multiple? Just like in

The United States of Tara. The Three Faces of Eve. Sybil. When Rabbit Howls. Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde. Fight Club. The Dark Tower. Identity. Raising Cain. Me, Myself & Irene. Heroes. One Life to Live. X-Men?”

“Oh, so you’re singlet? Just like in

Nightmare on Elm Street. The People Versus Larry Flynt. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. ER. All About Eve. Frankenstein. Desperately Seeking Susan. Superman. Ace Ventura, Pet Detective. As The World Turns?”



“I have antennae?”

n. (Ronin Ellis)

A clever friend from another system was once asked how many people were in his group. He refused to give a number, saying instead that multiples compare group size like jocks in a locker room.

How many are in our group? Nobody seems to be entirely sure. Ian, after two years of trying to map each of us on a chart and list our characteristics, to organize us, quantify us, and by doing so get a sense of control over us- finally gave up, and when asked “how many?” just says “enough.”

I decided against doing a roll call for this zine, and getting each of us to give a little blurb about ourselves and introduce ourselves as though this was some sort of parade or sideshow. You can see our names associated with our entries and articles and artworks. The things we’ve said, shown, and done should say more than some sterile list of names, ages, genders, sexual orientations, likes and dislike. Not all of us have contributed to this zine, but it’ll give you a sense of our group. (Note that materials borrowed from outside sources, such as Björk and Robert Silverberg, are in a different font.)

Nathan once suggested to the community of multiples the adoption of a “multiple pride” symbol: the italic letter *n* in a circle. In statistics, *n* represents “an unknown number of people.” The circle represents the single body they share.

How many people are in our system? *n*.



the society of multiples. part three. (Ronin Ellis)

In a society of multiples, there is no warfare. How do you kill an enemy who shares a body with an ally? Instead there is tension; and constant discussion, debate, argument, agreement, understanding, bickering, yelling, peacemaking, seduction, support. And some of it is silent.

But very little flattery, or deceit, or backstabbing , or gossip- within systems, anyways. How can you be disingenuous to someone who might hear your thoughts or see the things you do?

only the original counts (Nathan Day)

“Well, you're not really...

...gay

...straight

...bisexual

...asexual

...omnisexual

...a woman

...a man

...a boy

...a girl

...eighteen

...twenty-nine

...twelve

...forty

...fifty-seven

...5'8

...6'6

...5'7

...6'1

...brown-eyed

...green-eyed

...extroverted

...misanthropic

...cheery

...antisocial

...transgendered

...hispanic

...genderqueer

...blonde

...redheaded

...black-haired

...autistic

...atheist

...catholic

...pagan

...angry

...upset

...disinterested

...in love

...my friend

...because *only the original counts*.”

(...or maybe you just can't count past one.)

mineField. part three. (Ronin Ellis)

So much of conversation revolves around, “This one time, I...” Personal experience dictates our opinions and view of the world. It’s offered up as evidence, shared as humour, given as insight into ourselves.

But English, for all of its absurdly large vocabulary, is sadly lacking in even the most everyday pronouns: no gender neutral third-person singular (he/she/?), and no separate second-person singular and plural (you/you). For me, living in a system where shared memory is muddy, and it’s possible to remember something without having experienced it (or not remember something you experienced firsthand), I find myself lacking several important pronouns. How do I start a story that I remember clearly but didn’t experience? I’ve muddled around with it. “This one time, we...” sounds odd, as if I was also personally there, or as if I was there with a group of (physical) people. “This one time, my headmate Ian...” is wordy, and what happens if I don’t know who the experience happened to? The memory might be very relevant or poignant in the conversation, and I might want to share it, but I might be forced to not share it for reasons of inadequate language to express myself truthfully.

Around those who don’t know I’m multiple, of course, I always refer to the group in first-person singular. “This one time, I...” even though it’s not correct and I’m stealing someone else’s experiences. It’s not actually mine.

'these are my split' (Jeffrey Jacob Ellis)

these are my split
personality rules:

no bickering. falls follow
pride, folly is the devil's
playmate; love before war,
peace before suffering.

only fools rush into
these sorts of things, without licences.

sometimes you awaken to
conversations and things
happening: you have to
explain

that life is sleepwalking: only moments before,
everything was blank:

you are behind the wheel
but do not know where you
are driving. you make these sorts of things
up as you go:

the past is a fiction somebody else wrote as biography

-never autobiography.

identity theft. (Ronin Ellis)

It's all fine to call yourself a person and declare yourself a free moral agent. But isn't it just a philosophical exercise? The country I live in currently has a history of some of the most liberal and progressive human rights in the world; women's suffrage, equal rights for all races and creeds, the right to practice one's culture, low censorship, freedom of religion, representation in court, the right to peaceful demonstration and free association. These rights, in practice, aren't absolute, but they improve and evolve all the time.

But in an important way- at least, an important way to me- they're very heavily biased. They're all human rights, not person's rights. They're first-person-body rights.

I have no means of obtaining a birth certificate, driver's license, social insurance number, bank account, representation in court, copyright, trademark, business license, or marriage certificate. And when I mention these things, singlets sometimes remark "but you have all these things already." Just as many argued for the longest time that homosexuals have always had the right to marry- so long as they marry someone of the opposite sex. Yes, in practice I can use Jon's paraphernalia of personhood as necessary, and as the main front I have been given the responsibility to do so. I hold a job under his name, I rent an apartment and pay bills under his name. In an election, it is my choice to cast a vote. It's not like he can have me charged for identity theft- you can't charge a person who doesn't exist. Even if you could, how could I be fined or sent to jail without punishing the innocent victims who are other members of our system? In practice, the idea of extending legal personhood to individuals in a multiple system falls apart. Our entire system of human rights is dependent on the idea that one body is one person.

And like it or not, there's no way to prove that you are multiple. Some people would lie to use that extension of rights to cheat the system. Imagine if each ident had the right to vote? Legally establishing oneself as a system of thousands would be an easy way to stuff a ballot.

There is no real solution. That is one of the reasons why this zine is published without copyright; none of us, except Jon, can legally claim copyright on it anyways. I'd rather thumb my nose to the system that has never heard of me than sign my rights away to someone I barely know. Besides, I'm not a big fan of the copyright system anyways. I'm not writing for profit. I'm writing to be heard. Copy away. Spread the word.

I have one right that singlets do not have. I am a person with the right to legal nonpersonhood; my existence mocks the system from the shadows in ways that they can not. I have no individual right to vote, but also no individual responsibility to vote.

Besides: who needs a birth certificate, if you were never born?

(next page: Ronin's "certificate of nonbirth," by Ian)

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

RONIN OLIVER ELLIS

WAS NOL BORN ON
the 17th OF MARCH, 1995 CE.
(AT THE AGE OF FIFTEEN)

This certificate of nonbirth not recognized by any governing body except the

DESIRE
CONSTELLATION

ROSLYN

JADE ROSLYN, PRES.

the society of singlets. (Ronin Ellis)

In a society of singlets, it can be easy to hide. Make few friends, and be inconsistent with them. Vacillate between periods of hypersociality and antisociality. Slice up the social pie and dole out the sections, and hope to never see any two social circles overlap. Profess a terrible memory. Avoid your family.

If you must hide your multiplicity from yourself as well, never read your own journals. Convince yourself that you have a horrible sense of time. Constantly move, and distance yourself from the past. Think little about old times. Do not plan for a future you cannot own. Don't look too closely at your eyes in the mirror. Don't look too closely at your wardrobe.

And do not do the math. Do not even count. Do not add two and two together. Do not notice what's been subtracted from the calendar. Do not notice any divisions in your supposedly singular character. Do not multiply your problems needlessly.



And when doubt creeps in, remember: one body, equals one body, equals one body. There's no need to do any higher math than that.

the Desired Constellation. (Ronin Ellis)

You can't hide forever, and when the time was right a decision was made to let Ian and Nathan know that they weren't alone. We knew it would be a difficult time, but it was hard sometimes to be patient.

Ian is the sort of guy who feels that if he can systematize and analyze something, he has control over it. Unable to make the rest of us go away, he instead became obsessed with mapping and charting us all.

Nathan, exasperated, put on some gentle music.

Ian scrawled away on a notebook page, finding connections and drawing lines between names based on superficialities like similar names and character traits.

Bjork came on over the speakers. A song called "Desired Constellation," which begins: "It's tricky when you feel that somebody has done something on your behalf."

Frustrated, he scrawled UNDESIRED CONSTELLATION across the top of the page.

Gently, Ana took the pen and crossed out the UN. "You've missed the point. This isn't a burden or a disease. This is the cure. We're all of the right pieces in all of the right places. We would all be nowhere without each other, whether you knew that or not."

It was unanimous; we took the group name Desired Constellation.

the Desired Constellation. (lyrics by Björk)

It's tricky when you feel someone has done something on your behalf
It's slippery when your sense of justice murmurs underneath and is asking you,
How am I going to make it right?
How am I going to make it right?

With a palm full of stars
I throw them like dice, repeatedly
On the table, repeatedly
I shake them like dice
And throw them on the table, repeatedly
Until the desired constellation appears.

How am I going to make it right?
How am I going to make it right?
How am I going to make it right?
And did you hear, how am I going to make it right?

What do you want from us? (Annabelle-Lee “Ana” Kinder)

Most people, when faced with multiplicity for the first time, don't really know what to think. There's not much to go on. Society hasn't really weighed in on what it thinks of us. In that vacuum, it's always puzzling/frustrating/amusing/worrying to watch people try to sort it out in their head. They fumble around for a bit, grasp at straws, and then start asking questions:

"Is one of you a serial killer?"

"Are they all like you?"

"Are there like, any, *y'know*, chicks in there?"

"Which one is the gay/straight/extroverted/tidy/zany/spooky/goth/emo one?"

"Is it difficult, living like this?"

"Which one are you? Have I met any of the others?"

"Are you dangerous?"

"Were you molested as a child?"

All shots in the dark, all the wrong questions. Ian is pretty patient and good at giving answers to these sorts of things. And then, once their morbid curiosity is sated (and they still know almost nothing about multiplicity or about us), some people start to get to the point:

"I'm not really sure how to react to all of this. What do you want from me?"

Now that's a good question. What do I want from you? I think the first thing I want is for you to see me. I don't take the front very often, because being seen as a tall, masculine man is difficult for me to handle. I don't look in mirrors. I speak quietly because it's hard to handle the sound of this voice. I cringe at being called by our legal, male first name.

What I want from you is to to see me instead of looking at me. To acknowledge that I'm a woman, even though due to my circumstances I have no recourse to transition and appear as one on the outside. To see me as a sensitive but determined soul. To laugh with me at the blind folly of the human condition. To yell with me in frustration at the ignorance of people. To cry with me at the heartbreak of it.

But that first step, the telling, is so hard; and the second step, answering your stupid questions, is so maddening; and asking you to see beyond this exterior is like asking you swim an ocean to a foreign land. So you won't laugh with me, or yell with me, or cry with me. I'm stuck here on this other shore, waiting.

What do we want from you? I don't even know if I know how to ask. It's far too much.

one Body + one Wall + one Fall

=

not enough Horses + not enough Men

=

one piece of Eggshell + one piece of Eggshell +
many more pieces of Eggshell

→

one basket of Eggs

→

one flock of Birds

≠

Integration

<

co-Operation

appendices

Glossary (Ronin Ellis)

The following glossary mostly describes the words used by multiples themselves to describe their own experiences, and is drawn from communities of multiples. Also included are words we've coined to express our own experiences and terms used in psychiatric literature.

Singlet: a person residing alone in their body.

Multiple: more than one *ident* sharing a single body. Refers to separate, self-aware entities rather than pseudonyms, characters, or personality facets. A group of *idents* sharing a body are referred to as a *group* or *system*. *System* may also refer to not just the group of *idents* but the way they organize and experience themselves as a group, sometimes known tongue-in-cheek as their *operating system* or *OS*. Like any group or organization, systems often take on a group name. Ours is *the Desired Constellation*.

Ident: a term coined by Ian, of our group. It refers to any entity which perceives itself as a separate, antonymous person, regardless of the context in which it exists. For example: a singlet is a body with one *ident*, a multiple is a body with several *idents*, an artificial intelligence is an *ident* residing within a computer. *Idents* are usually complex and multi-faceted, having different moods and different sides to their personality. The term is meant to be less dehumanizing than the psychiatric term *alter*, which only applies to multiples and insinuates a one-sided stock character. In multiples, *idents* often have names, personalities, and characteristics not in line with the body they reside in. *Idents* generally view themselves as distinct persons, even when fully aware that they share a body.

DID/MPD: stands for *Dissociative Identity Disorder*, previously known as *Multiple Personality Disorder*. Multiples are thought

to have been studied by science and medicine since ancient Greece, but it wasn't until the twentieth century that early psychiatry (influenced by both Freud and Janet) decided that trauma was the cause of multiplicity, and not until 1973 (with the publication of *Sibyl*, a fictionalized biography of a patient with MPD) that sexual abuse was specifically targeted as the cause. Not all multiples identify as having DID. Among multiples, groups with DID are often referred to as *trauma multiples*.

Front: the ident currently in control of the body is referred to as being *on front*, or *fronting*. May also refer to the ident who is most commonly on front, usually called the *main front*. Those who are not in the front may experience no passage of time and have no memory of events, or may remember events they didn't personally experience from a disconnected perspective.

Co-fronting: the experience of more than one ident being in control of the body simultaneously. Similar to *co-consciousness*, i.e. one ident being in control while others are awake and conscious of the experience. While co-fronting or co-conscious, idents can communicate, pool resources, share control, and deliberate on decisions together.

Blurring: co-conscious idents experiencing an overlap of consciousness, temporarily experiencing themselves as joined or even as one consciousness while being aware of themselves as distinct individuals underneath.

Headmate: a word describing the relationship between different idents living in the same body, analogous to *roommate*.

Dissociation: in psychiatry, refers to two or more cognitive processes operating in parallel but lacking connectiveness. For example, someone experiencing dissociation may see an image that would normally cause a distinct emotional

response, but feel nothing. They may feel disconnected from the world around them, have difficulties with concentration or memory, or feel that they are lacking in personality or identity. Dissociation usually occurs in episodes and affects most people from time to time, usually only mildly and in short duration. It is a symptom of many several mental illnesses, such as depression. According to the *trauma model* (DID), severe trauma causes an individual to dissociate so heavily that their core personality begins to fracture. As an escape mechanism, new identities form to experience the trauma so that the core doesn't have to.

Dyscalculia: analogous to dyslexia, dyscalculia is a disability affecting one's ability to work with numbers.

Healthy Multiplicity: a term used by non-trauma multiples, and multiples who have worked through the trauma but have chosen against *integration* (a psychiatric term referring to the joining together of the *alters* to return a patient to being singular). A healthy multiple is a group who does not experience their multiplicity as a disorder, but has decided to live together co-operatively.

You: one of the most frustrating words for multiples and those who know them. For a language with such a ridiculously bloated lexicon, English is embarrassingly short on pronouns. There is no gender-neutral third-person singular for people (he, she, it?) and no distinction between second-person singular and plural pronouns (you, you). Friends of multiples often resort to clumsy constructions like "yous" and "you-all" to clarify whether they're referring to an ident or the whole system. Constructing a possessive second-person plural is even worse: "yous's?" "yours-all?" "you-alls's?" "Is that your t-shirt or you's t-shirt?" "Is that your opinion or yours-all opinion?" At least "yourself" gracefully adjusts itself to "yourselves."

Further reading (Ronin Ellis)

zines

The Gang's All Here edited by Loony-Brain (contributions by several systems)

FTMPD by Rogan Lee (a great read by a multiple transman)
(both hosted at

<http://healthymultiplicity.com/loonybrain/ZinesHome.html>)

books

When Rabbit Howls by the Troops for Truddi Chase (a DID autobiography but also an inspiration to many healthy multiples)

short stories

Multiples by Robert Silverberg (hosted at

<http://astraeasweb.net/plural/multiples-silverberg.html>)

webcomics

Gemini Webcomic by the Zyfron System

(<http://healthymultiplicity.com/Zyfron/Gemini/>)

websites

HealthyMultiplicity.com

(<http://www.HealthyMultiplicity.com>) (*an index of sites about functional multiplicity*)

Astraea's Web

(<http://www.astraeasweb.net/plural/>) (*great for perspectives from a wider range of multiples whose experiences are different from ours*)

LiveJournal Multiplicity community

(<http://community.livejournal.com/multiplicity/>) (*the main gathering place on the internet for multiples and sympathetic singlets*)

awesomeastrid's YouTube channel

(<http://www.youtube.com/user/awesomeastrid>) (*a great resource by the Mosaic Gang*)

about this document. (Nathan Day)

This document is in .pdf format, and is scaled and formatted to be easily readable on an e-book reader or printed in half-page booklet format. If you are viewing this on a computer you might want to adjust the settings from “Fit to Page” to 100% or 150%, or whatever size is comfortable for you.

We have consented to Ronin's choice to waive copyright on this document, since we cannot legally represent ourselves as individual artists and writers and would be forced to resort to using our legal name, which to us is a legal fiction and a lie. Therefore, the non-copyrighted status is meant as a form of protest.

However: I ask that, should you use this document (quote it, reproduce it, etc.) that you attribute the author or authors you borrow from, as a sign of respect.

Consideration was made for the visual impaired when possible; notable images have descriptive text for the benefit of those using text-to-speech readers.

If you're curious about the images not already described:

“discovery” contains a doodle of a sad-looking little critter called a 'deadfish.'

“THE PROOF” contains a page from Ronin's journal. The background is a picture of Clark Kent opening his shirt to reveal the Superman logo, with the thought balloon “Now to switch to my other identity as Superman!” Ronin has scrawled a message to Ian and I on the page: “I AM STILL REAL EVEN IF YOU REMEMBER” and “THANKS FOR THE PUDDING.”

“7th Chance” contains a doodle of a deadfish lying on the ground with his skullcap removed and his brain exposed; another deadfish is poking at his brain saying “if only you

were reprogrammable.” Which is really morbid as I describe it, but the doodle is pretty cute.

“mineField. part two.” contains an image of the scrawled words “I AM NOT YOUR REAL SON.”

“oh, just like in that show...” contains a doodle of a deadfish innocently looking upwards, saying “I have antennae?” (He does.)

“n.” is followed by the multiplicity symbol Ronin described.

Ronin's Certificate of NonBirth reads:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
RONIN OLIVER ELLIS
WAS NOT BORN ON
the 17th of March, 1995 C.E.
(at the age of fifteen)

This certificate of non-birth not recognized by any
governing body except the
DESIRED CONSTELLATION
(signature) Jade Roslyn, Pres.

“the society of singlets.” contains a doodle of a deadfish looking nervously down at a happy little dog wagging its tail. The deadfish is holding a bone and saying, “i can make you do whatever i want (i think).”

“contact” information in the appendix (after this page) contains an image of the Desired Constellation logo, a five-pointed asterix overlapped by a circle.

The deadfish are little critters Ian originally designed for a webcomic called “You Have To Go Through A Lot Of Dead Fish To Find A Warm Rodent.” The webcomic never aired, but Ian, Ronin, and I still occasionally make these doodles.

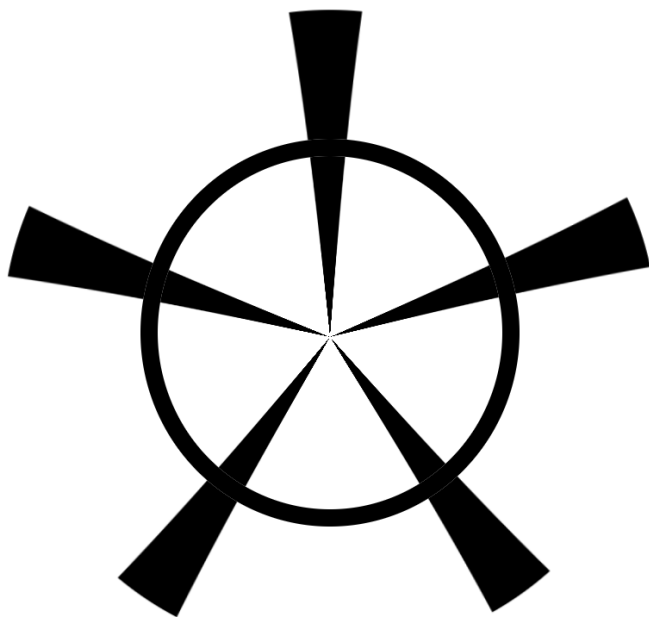
gratitude (Ian Night)

We owe our thanks to the following people and groups who provided resources and inspiration to make this zine possible:

Ken; Astraea; Molly, Charlie & Co.; Jen; the Mosaics; the LJ Multiplicity community; and to anyone who reads, hosts, copies, quotes, or in any way shares this work.

contact (Ian Night)

To contact the Desired Constellation, email us at dconstellation@gmail.com. Email us for any ridiculous or serious reason you see fit.



the Desired Constellation