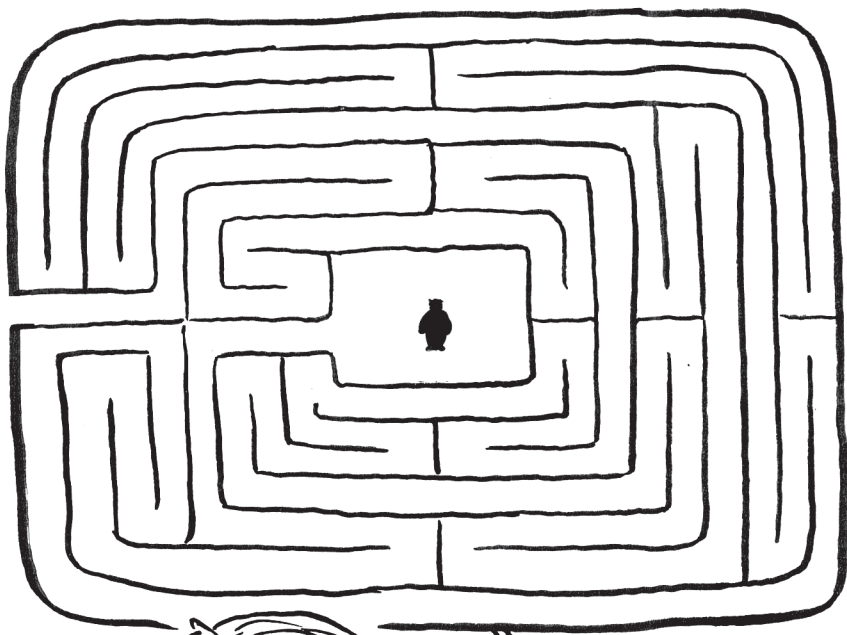


Rogan's Aphasia



By Mori
of LB Lee

The Obligatory Intro (blah)

We are multi. (AKA multiple personalities).
Other comics go into more detail. All you need
to know for this book is, the following people
live in the same body:



Mori: me! I shouldn't be in charge!
I'm an abrasive pain in the ass!

← Rogan: responsibility hog.
No shit his ass would drop!



Sneak: ray of sunshine
the most creative!

← Bob: wants to know
how our brain works (me too, dude)



Mac: Rogan's husband.
A royal horndog!

Okay, on with the zine! (phew)

In May 2023, my headmate Roger went aphasic.



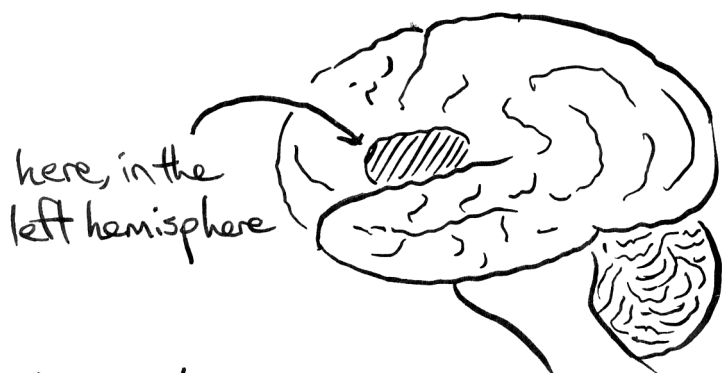
He still understood us fine. He just couldn't speak, write, or sign more than a couple words at a time, preferably content words. Tenses, conjugations, plural vs. singular, all that grammar stuff seemed to lose or confuse him.

At first, we hoped it'd just go away, and after four days, it did. But then it came back... for three and a half weeks. It sucked. Suddenly I was the one performing the LB Lee persona at home, work, cons, and social events.

I am a well-adjusted, housebroken adult and I will not punch anybody.



Why was this happening? And why only to Rogan? Well, Broca's aphasia (Rogan's kind) is caused by a specific kind of brain damage:



We have a history of, ahem, "neurological injury" which is euphemism for, "Mom like to smother, strangle, and drown us as kids." We've also had multiple concussions. Most of the time, we managed to mostly recover. (Though we get days-long headaches, need a lot of sleep, sometimes process things slow, get easily lost or confused, and so on.)

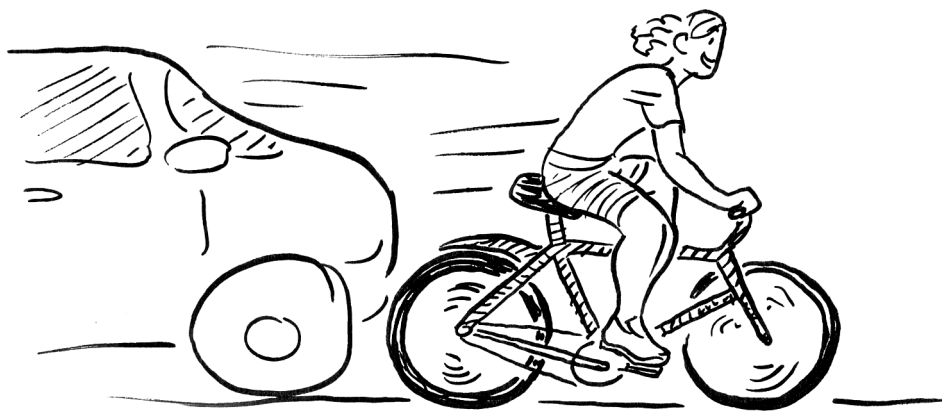
Rogan in particular took a lot of these injuries, and he was dealing with the memory of a particularly bad one. In some way, I think he was reliving the injuries, and thus re-manifesting old symptoms. As he composted the memory, neutralizing and coming to terms with it, he recovered once again and got his words back... for now.

Why only Roagen, though? Our headmate Bob has a theory:



If we think of the brain as a giant supercity, neurons as roads, and damage as roadblocks, maybe different headmates are different route and travel patterns through it all.

It's just a guess, but it would explain our varying skills and impairments. We all live in the same city, but have very different ways of navigating it! It'd sure be adaptive, growing up the way we did. Maybe it helped us compensate for the damage.



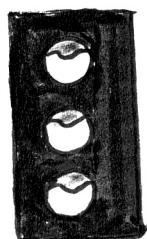
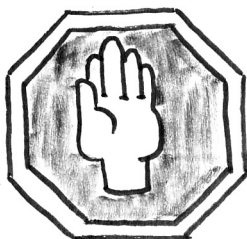
Theory's all well and good, but what could we do for Rogan in the meantime so he could communicate? Much like the MBTA, his mental transit system was clearly experiencing "delays in service."

His sense of symbol and picture, though, was fully intact. He knew the meaning of what he wanted to say; he just kept getting turned around by the grammatical complexity of spoken, written, and signed language. Could we work around that?

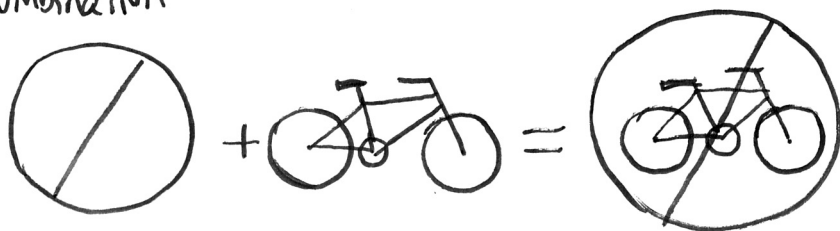
Being a cartoonist, we knew how to convey meaning through images in sequence:



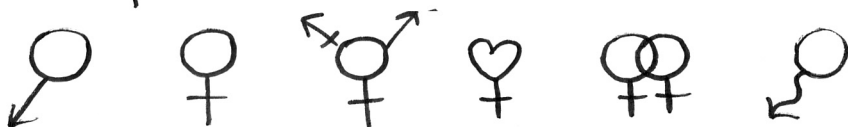
Thanks to folks like Henry Dreyfuss and Charles Bliss, we also knew that graphical symbols could be used to communicate across language barriers. A symbol's meaning could be adjusted using color:



Combination:



Or shape:



Could we adapt this knowledge for the sake of Rogan's communication? What if, instead of insisting on forcing through the neurological traffic jam...



...we found another route, another way? Even if it was slower, weirder, or less socially acceptable?



Here's what we tried.

😊 Emoticons ♥

Using a mix of text, emotes, and other miscellaneous images via online chat programs. Discord has a zillion icons, and Rogan could use them to hold a pretty decent conversation! More so than any other method!



- + Flexible!
- + Complex concepts can sometimes get expressed!
- + Screenreadable by blind friends???
- requires high tech, so...
- we can't do this outdoors.

Verdict: best overall method, especially for distance communication and techies.

Cards

Drawing symbols on little 3" squares of scrap card-stock, punching holes in them, and stringing them on a carabiner using cardboard dongles to label sections (with ☺, +-, etc.) We put opposite or related concepts on each side (☺, ☹). ~30 cards ~60 signs!



- + pocket-size
- + low-tech
- + cheap and easy to make and modify
- + line up cards for more complex statements
- limited vocabulary (only so many cards you can sort through), so...
- ...less complexity is expressable.

Verdict: Rogan's favorite for headmate or in-person conversations.



Communication Boards



These are the "classic" means of alternative communication, used in schools and such: sheets, with little tiles containing words and statements the person can point to. "Books" of sheets can be hole-punched and bound with brads or a binder, with tabs for easy sorting ("descriptions," "actions," "topic: meals"...))



+ more versatile, higher vocab than cards
+ low-tech, fit easily in backpack

- bulkier than cards
- overwhelmingly cutesy kid design, so...
- ...Rogan loathes them.



Verdict: we carry it, but Rogan has refused to use it even once.

Make Your Own Cards!

You need:

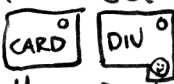
preferably
different
colors

- 1 sheet of scrap cardboard
- 1 pack of index cards or scrap cardstock (normal paper tears too easily; cardboard's harder to punch)
- holepunch
- Scissors
- 1-2 carabiners (make sure the holepunch holes are big enough to fit!)
- pencils, pens, markers, etc.
- 1 rubber band (holds cards together for protection)

Directions:

- ① You want your cards pretty uniform in size and shape to keep them from getting beat up, so cut the index cards in half or the cardstock to size; ~3" square is plenty of room.
- ② Punch holes in the same corner of each card, so they will hang together neatly (and durably).
- ③ Write/draw a concept on each side of the card; opposites/similars are good pairs. Don't get hung up on making them perfect, pretty, or grammatical! You can always toss or remake bum cards! Or add new!
(Example pairs: ☺/☹, ++/--, √/⊗, A-2/10-9)

④ Divide the cards into sections, if need be. Keep it simple! We have 😊 for emotions, +- for modifiers. Keep anything you need regularly up front. (Our topmost card is, "I am having trouble speaking and am using these cards to communicate. I understand you fine.")

⑤ Cut cardboard section dividers. These will need to stick out past the cards so you can see them all at a glance!  or  Also make sure they're different lengths or shapes from each other too, or they'll cover each other up! 

⑥ Stack your cards and dividers and put them on the carabiners. Keep a couple blank cards at the back to replace ripped ones or make new ones. Rubber band them together to protect them. (If you have two carabiners, link them together so you can pop them off your bag/belt loop/lanyard without dropping cards.)

⑦ USE 'EM. Only through use will you learn what cards you really need, what works for you. Fancy cards, you'll be reluctant to toss and redo. Make 'em cheap, make 'em ugly, make 'em work. Use in loud concerts, for deaf friends, whatever, just use 'em!

But there was a kind of poetry in the ways Rogan communicated while aphasic. A lot of dithering and equivocating got cut, out of necessity. You had to pay more attention, meet him halfway.



We don't know if Rogan will go aphasic again, but if he does, we'll be ready. Grace, who's mostly mute by default (though in a different way), is glad to finally have a communication method not made for kindergartners; it might help other less verbal headmates too. We plan to bring our cards to noisy cons and clubs from here on out.

It was tough. But I think we handled it well.

Want to Learn More?

Stuff that helped us during this:

Cole, B. Erin. Little Brain's Guide to Post-Concussion Syndrome. Self-published, 2018. Read online at: www.littlebraincomics.com/little-brains-guide-to-post-concussion-syndrome/

DomesticShelters.org. "How Strangulation Affects the Brain." Accessed July 12, 2023. <https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/health/how-strangulation-affects-the-brain>

Dreyfuss, Henry. Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972.

Konigsburg, E. L. Silent to the Bone. New York: Simon Pulse, 2000. ← kidlit, gave us the cards idea

Roseberry Erin. Brain Damage Comix. Self-published, 2017-2022. Read online at ko-fi.com/s/e3e85abf78 or fox-teeth.tumblr.com/braininjurycomix

Tobii Dynavox, LLC. Core First Communication Book. Download: us.tobii-dynavox.com/products/core-first-communication-books ← good communication board, free!

Tufte, Edward R. Envisioning Information. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990.

Also the Wikipedia page for "expressive aphasia."

Speechless Semiotics

When Rogan, LB's main fronter, found himself unable to speak, write, or sign more than a few words at a time, it could've been a disaster. Instead, his headmate Mori stepped in (and made a zine about it, with his OK). Herein:

- What is aphasia?
- Why might Rogan have had it?
- How we worked around it.



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