The odd couple: Richard Hartshorne and William Bunge

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Key Messages

- Drawing on personal correspondence can enhance histories of geography.
- Adding "backstage" histories of geography to conventional "frontstage" versions demonstrates the effect that private relationships can have on public scholarship.

This article reviews the tempestuous 17-year long correspondence between two well-known American 20th-century human geographers, Richard Hartshorne (1899–1992) and William Bunge (1928–2013). Using Ervin Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, the article suggests that their correspondence affords an opportunity to supplement standard "frontstage" histories of the discipline with a warts-and-all "backstage" version.

Keywords: Richard Hartshorne, William Bunge, private letters, history of geography

Un drôle de couple : Richard Hartshorne et William Bunge

Cet article fait état des 17 ans de correspondance tumultueuse entre Richard Hartshorne (1899-1992) et William Bunge (1928-2013), deux spécialistes notoires de la géographie sociale américaine du 20e siècle. Le recours au concept dramaturgique préconisé par Ervin Goffman en 1959 nous amène à penser que leur correspondance fournit une occasion d'élargir le « devant de la scène " des histoires classiques de la discipline avec une version des « coulisses ", sans fard ni artifice.

Mots clés : Richard Hartshorne, William Bunge, lettres personnelles, histoire de la géographie

Introduction

I have wanted to tell this story ever since I first read their correspondence at the American Geographical Society (AGS) library at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, in the summer of 2010. From the opening letter I was riveted, maybe even a bit obsessed. Just when you thought it couldn't get stranger, it did. Just when you thought, that's it, that's too much, they are never going to write to one another again, they did. It was tragic and comic, often at the same time. You cried (while secretly laughing), and laughed (while secretly crying). It was Oedipus Rex and Monty Python joined.

"It" is a set of letters that were exchanged between Richard Hartshorne and William Bunge over a 17-year period from 1959 to 1976. The letters form part of the Richard Hartshorne Papers held at the AGS library. Bunge's letters are in their own separate file, "William Bunge – File F." It contains copies of Bunge's letters, letters about Bunge, newspaper clippings, and other *obiter dicta* bearing on Bunge,

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as well as Hartshorne's replies. Undoubtedly there were more letters written between the men than I found in "File F." Hartshorne (1959d) in one of his letters, spoke about a letter that Bunge wrote to him that was so awful that he stopped reading it. He sent it back. That awful letter was not there. But others, including also quite awful ones, remained.

At least in the large overviews of geography's history—David Livingstone's (1992) well-known and excellent *The Geographical Tradition* is an example—little use is made of private correspondence among geographers. Of course, biographies of geographers draw on private correspondence (e.g., Smith 2004; Kearns 2009). These volumes are not principally about the history of geography, and, in any case, few biographies are written in the discipline. Recently, Geoffrey Martin (2015) has given much needed attention to geographer's correspondence in his *magnum opus*, *American Geography and Geographers*. Private letters form the spine of his century-long history of American Geography. His disciplinary history *is* the history of epistolary exchange among geographers. As good as it is, the flow of mail in his volume for my purposes flags at exactly the wrong moment. While his book quotes many lengthy exchanges between Hartshorne and his varied correspondents (Hartshorne is perhaps the central figure in the entire book), Martin is strangely silent about the letters between Hartshorne and Bunge. There are only two mentions of Bunge, and neither are about his letters even though Bunge was a feverish letter writer (Martin (2015).

Martin's justification for focussing on letters is that they provide access to historical truth. He writes, "it is largely from the correspondence saved by individuals or archived by institutions that a legitimate history may be retrieved" (Martin 2015, xv-xvi). While this might be one reason (although the archive as a repository of Truth certainly has been long criticized, see Stoler 2009), there is another, going to the intent of my article, and turning on the peculiar kind of information private letters afford.

Private letters offer an opportunity to see behind the scenes of geography's official history. Geography's history is usually presented as a series of formal disembodied ideas, or, if they are associated with particular bodies, bodies that write only finished books or journal articles. Geographers if they appear in such histories do so as only as their public academic selves. Once we start including personal letters, though, we begin to see a private self. Using Erving Goffman's (1959) vocabulary, by including private letters within an account of the history of geography we begin to glimpse a "backstage"; that is, we witness elements not normally present in formal discussions published in "front stage" research monographs and scholarly journals. Goffman (1959) developed his dramaturgical approach in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The gist is that in our social interactions we perform a version of ourselves that we would like others (the audience) to believe is us. We do this on what Goffman (1959) calls the "front stage." It is where the official position is made visible, where conventions are upheld. The backstage, though, is where you let your hair down, where you say what you really think. This can generate contradictions with the front stage, producing conflict and difference. Hartshorne's and Bunge's correspondence starkly illuminates the backstage. We start to appreciate what is brought to their frontstage academic work, but usually concealed, such as gender, emotional baggage, biography, and past relationship. Their letters are laden by circumstance, expressed sometimes with rawness, and consequently giving a different grain to the history of geography, making its stakes more immediate, vital and gripping.

Context

At the beginning of the correspondence, Richard Hartshorne was possibly the most well-known American geographer alive. Professor of Geography at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, an anchor point for a hegemonic US Mid-Western geography (Porter 1978), Hartshorne's reputation rested primarily on his book, *The Nature of Geography* (Hartshorne 1939). That volume meticulously explicated, rigorously justified, and genealogically fixed the discipline of geography like no other English language volume before it. Arguing for regional geography, his book contended that regions could be only described (not explained as in natural science), and treated as unique. "Regional geography . . . is essentially a descriptive science concerned with the description and interpretation of unique cases" Hartshorne (1939, 449) wrote.

Hartshorne's view was described as idiographic as opposed to nomothetic. That distinction was first

made in the late 19th century by two German philosophers, Wilhelm Windelbaum and Heinrich Rickert (Staiti 2013). They divided disciplines into two kinds: the idiographic was concerned with the unique (history was their exemplar); and the nomothetic was concerned with making generalizations, and the ultimate generalization, a scientific law (their examples were chemistry and physics). While Hartshorne (1939) briefly reviewed that distinction, he did not directly apply it to his own work. Nevertheless, he held that regions were necessarily unique entities (Hartshorne 1939). The kernel of his argument was that each region was constituted by a set of overlapping complexes of interrelated geographical elements (an "element complex" in his vocabulary). While several regions might share one element complex—for example, the Po plain, the Middle Danube plain, and the American Corn Belt all had in common the element complex "grain production"—no region shared with another region in the same combination all available element complexes (Hartshorne 1936). Because it did not, it followed that each region "occurs but once on the earth" (Hartshorne 1939, 393). It was unique. And if it was unique, then regional geography was idiographic, like history. No law-like statements about regions were possible.

In 1953, that conclusion was contested by the socialist German political refugee and statistical economist, but born-again geographer, Fred K. Schaefer. In the flagship journal of American geography, the *Annals*, Schaefer (1953) railed against Hartshorne's idiographic approach that he called "exceptionalism" (see Martin 1989 on the odd circumstances surrounding the publication of Schaefer's paper). Drawing on logical positivism, Schaefer proposed a nomothetic regional geography capable of deriving morphological laws; that is, "purely geographical laws [that] contain no reference to time and change" (Schaefer 1953, 243). Such laws would take the form: if geographical pattern A, then geographical pattern B. Schaefer was dead before Hartshorne even read his article, and hence in no condition to respond to Hartshorne's (1954, 1955) two blistering and scathing replies. But Bunge, for whom Schaefer was a hero, could and did. That's one reason why some of Bunge's letters were so awful. There were other reasons too.

Bunge and Hartshorne had a history. Conscripted for the Korean War (1950-1952), Bunge mainly served his time in the US Army Chemical, Biological and Radiological Wartime School at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, "teaching atomic war" as Bunge (1988, xi) put it. It was also there that he "commenced his formal studies in geography" (Bunge 1988, xi). His first class at "the Extension Division of the University of Wisconsin" was with Richard Hartshorne—"the first professional geographer I met in my life" (Bunge 1988, xi). It led him to complete a Master's degrees in Geography at Wisconsin (1953-1955), and enter its PhD programme. That didn't go so well, however. In 1957 Bunge failed his preliminary exams, and left the programme. Hartshorne cast a negative vote.

Bunge moved to the Department of Geography, University of Washington, Seattle. Physically on the margin, perched on the Pacific Ocean, the Department of Geography at Washington was also intellectually marginal within the discipline of American geography. It was the perfect place to launch a revolution, which Bunge and others did (Barnes 2011). Bunge became a "space cadet," the name coined to denote the group of graduate students clustered primarily around a young galvanic faculty member, William Garrison, and to a lesser degree, an older hand, Edward Ullman (interestingly Bunge [1988, xi] preferred the even more militaristic collective moniker, "Garrison's Raiders"). The cadets were beginning self-consciously to practice an anti-Hartshornian geography, seeking explanation over description, generalization over the unique, methodologically following Schaefer—although even here Bunge (1974) showed some ambivalence, and later reflected in his paper "Regions are sort of unique". Bunge's PhD thesis was supervised by Garrison. Initially titled *Fundamental Geography* (later called *Theoretical Geography*), Bunge's dissertation was an evangelical appeal for making geography a science of spatial relations, its foundation the mathematics of space, geometry. Kevin Cox called Bunge's book "perhaps the seminal text of the spatial-quantitative revolution" (2001, 71).

The correspondence

Round 1

The letters between the two men began likely in May, 1959, as Bunge was finishing his doctoral thesis (Bunge rarely dated his letters, generally providing only the day of the week on which they were written,

sometimes not even that). Bunge's (1959a) first letter (unusually) opened with an apology, albeit for the stationary ("this is all I have left in the house"). Then came the confrontation: "The only serious methodological argument I have with anyone is with you and your posture on uniqueness. . . . I will just be forced to attack it" (Bunge 1959a). But the next paragraph kow-towed: "you are undoubtedly the world's most famous geographer," Bunge (1959a) fawned. This established the larger form for the entire correspondence. Bunge alternated between aggression and flattery often, as in this case, within the same letter.

Hartshorne's (1959b) reply bristled although not because of the poor stationary, but because of the word "posture." Hartshorne thought its use implied that he was making a "value judgment," an assertion that was "erroneous," if not "offensive." Hartshorne did not make value judgments. Bunge "must pay extreme attention to [his choice of] words and phrases—these are the equivalents of measurements," Hartshorne (1959b) chided.

Such a standard was impossible for Bunge to meet, however. He was the opposite of Hartshorne. His creativity stemmed precisely from the wildness of his words, and clear from his three page plus reply, with skinny margins and messy handwritten inserts. Peppered by typos, Bunge wrote, "I must seriously argue, no, that is a euphonism [*sic*], I must reject outright your philosophy of scince [*sic*]. . .. Worse, I must completely endorse Schaefer's methodology. (I do not care about his historical scholarship. I consider it irrelevant. . . .)" (Bunge (1959b). For Hartshorne, however, historical scholarship was everything. Running through Hartshorne's correspondence until almost the day he died (he lived until he was 91) was an obsession with the "fraud" of Schaefer's historical scholarship, and along with that, an overweening desire to correct anyone perpetrating that fraud (Hartshorne 1960). Bunge (1959b) was utterly uninterested, though: "history . . . can prove anything and therefore proves nothing," he said. It was Schaefer's philosophy of science that was crucial. That made the difference at Washington for him and the cadets. "We are achieving universality at the theoretical end. . .. We are theoretical or fundamental geographers [original emphasis]," he declared with space-cadet swagger (Bunge (1959b).

As he developed that theme, though, Bunge also brought into view some of the backstage, showing it wasn't quite as straightforward. He was hurt by what happened at Wisconsin, still carrying its emotional baggage. Consequently, in spite of Bunge's over-the-top praise, Hartshorne certainly upset him. Maybe he was "a little afraid" of him too (Bunge 1959b). He tried not to show it. While he admitted to Hartshorne that "the Wisconsin experience sobered" him, he still reckoned that at his prelims he "knew some much more important things . . . [than] what people who pass[ed] your exam kn[e]w" (Bunge 1959b). He also gleefully rubbed in the merits of the Washington Department. "I should have left Wisconsin for here," he wrote. "It is one of those rare places in the world or time, a department enjoying a golden period" (Bunge 1959b). Of course, the implied contrast was with Wisconsin, and not enjoying a golden period.

Firing off line numbers and page references from Schaefer's paper to prove Bunge wrong, Hartshorne's reply also began to twist the knife. Didn't Bunge know that at his prelims "he failed to show how much [he] did know" because he "was dominated by the feeling that [what he was taught was] unimportant" (Hartshorne 1959b)? Hartshorne (1959a) also began showing signs of testiness: "P.S. The value of this correspondence would be enhanced, I believe, if you would take thought to discipline yourself against personal comments or reactions. . .." (Hartshorne 1959b). In the reply Bunge (1959c) became both good cop and bad cop. "I don't want to sound as if I am against Hartshorne. I'm 99.9% in favor of Hartshorne. I consider myself one of your methodological disciples," he said. But in the very next paragraph he wrote: "As for my flunk out. My crime, absolute rudeness, was not as serious as the Wisconsin's staff, stupidity."

The correspondence continued over the summer, with Hartshorne repeatedly asking Bunge to provide any argument from Schaefer's article (with page and line numbers) that was both correct (not fraudulent), and in conflict with anything stated in *The Nature*. Frustrated by Bunge's lack of response, on September 4th Hartshorne (1959c) demanded that Bunge "show [his] cards." Bunge's reply was the letter Hartshorne returned ("Reading rapidly through the first few paragraphs I concluded I did not wish to read further," Hartshorne 1959d). Hartshorne nonetheless still replied to Bunge's "largely unread" letter, saying he would continue the correspondence but only if Bunge "could master [his] emotions and speak in [his] normal right mind"

(Hartshorne 1959d). Bunge's (1959d) response was short and blunt: "What are you trying to do, get in the last word? I may be sick, sick, sick but you are wrong, wrong, wrong. I'll see you in print."

Unsurprisingly the correspondence came to a halt for that year, although the (love-hate?) relationship continued by other means. Hartshorne was sent Bunge's book manuscript (based on his doctoral dissertation), *Theoretical Geography*, to review for the University of Washington press. He recommended rejection (Bunge [1960a] told Torsten Hägerstrand that Hartshorne said in his review that "the book should be burned!"). It was why Bunge (1962) eventually published his book with the small Swedish publisher, C. W. K. Gleerup. That did not adversely affect the volume's success, however. In 2001, ten years after Hartshorne died (although he may well have turned over in his grave), *Theoretical Geography* was given the imprimatur, "classic in human geography" (Cox 2001).

Round 2

In 1960, Bunge was hired as Visiting Assistant Professor at the Geography Department, University of Iowa. By October he was already in dispute with the Chair, Harold McCarty. It spilled onto the pages of even *The Daily Iowan*. Inevitably it was about Hartshorne. Bunge showed McCarty the methodology chapter from his thesis that he wanted to publish, an attack on Hartshorne. According to Bunge, McCarty initially said he should not submit the article because Iowa "would get into trouble with Hartshorne" (*The Daily Iowan* 1960a). Bunge then alleged McCarty changed his story, saying that the problem with Bunge's article was its poor scholarship, attacking Hartshorne personally rather than his ideas. This led Bunge to charge McCarty had "stifled his intellectual freedom," and also "lied" (*The Daily Iowan* 1960b). Curiously, though, Bunge (1960c) admitted he told McCarty at the same meeting that "someone ought to drive a wooden steak through Hartshorne's heart," although he insisted that his article remained "antiseptically impersonal."

Just as strange, during this same period Bunge (1960b, 1960c) broke his silence with Hartshorne, writing to him in December 1960 to ask if he would convince "Schaefer followers" at Iowa to support the continuation of regional geography there, and in danger of elimination. Hartshorne wrote two replies, although he sent only one. Neither addressed Bunge's request. The one not sent was a biting blow-by-blow recapitulation of his criticisms of Bunge's methodological position (Hartshorne 1960a. The other, initially more muted ("it appears you have a number of misapprehensions about me"), by the end turned into a pointed review of Bunge's failures: at his prelims ("some graded it much lower than I"); his methodological chapter ("it does not meet my standards of scholarship"); and his present "critical situation" at Iowa (Hartshorne 1960b).

Round 3

Hartshorne was right. It was critical. Bunge's contract was not renewed. The same year, 1961, he was let go at Iowa, he was offered a job at Wayne State University in Detroit. He took up the post that fall, moving into the Detroit inner city neighbourhood of Fitzgerald, and the focus of his next (classic) book (Bunge 1971). Wayne State did not work out for Bunge either, though. In autumn 1968, just after he was denied tenure—officially for obscenity in class (Barney 2015)—Bunge wrote a cheerful, congratulatory letter to Hartshorne. Bunge had inadvertently phoned Hartshorne. But Hartshorne never caught the caller's name, and only later worked out it was Bunge. He then wrote a short note to Bunge that prompted the letter.

Bunge (1968) told Hartshorne that after studying the one square mile of Fitzgerald ("I suppose no square mile has ever been studied as intensively"), he came to recognise that "all the classic concepts reported by classical regionalists [including Hartshorne] were true. The necessity for exhaustive fieldwork. The use of maps. The necessity for a 'feel of the region.'" Bunge (1968) admitted that "I have not found it easy. It is an agony but a marvellous agony. To have a life's work is a privilege." And while he had had "difficulties with geographers, and that should not be exaggerated … I have had the impression of you, that you never exploited geography, never wrote books for commercial purposes, never sold your integrity for power …. I have always respected that in you and missed seeing you …. I missed your discipline."

Round 4

It would have made for a lovely ending. Except it wasn't. There was one more exchange, and possibly

the most awful of all. In early 1976 Bunge wrote to Andrew Clark, the Chair of the Wisconsin Geography Department. Clark, however, had died of cancer a few months before. Instead the letter was forwarded to Hartshorne. Bunge (1976) began portentously announcing that his letter was about "Justice and Death." There followed in two jammed pages in ten point type a series of vituperative accusations directed at Hartshorne: "a cruel man"; a man of "revenge"; a man who provoked 'fear"; a man "who could never stand to lose"; a man "who wrote ... an ad to Joe McCarthy"'; a man "who knew how to play dirty tricks"; a man who was merciless to Schaefer even after death (and with an implication that Hartshorne was also somehow involved in that death). "We must do what Hartshorne did to Schaefer, Andy, we must piss on his grave." He signed the letter, "Sternly, William Bunge."

Hartshorne's (1976) reply is also fulsome, seven pages single-spaced, organised under 19 numbered points. Hartshorne remains stoic but he also can't help himself: he must correct. Each numbered point is a correction to each of Bunge's accusations, no matter how petty, wild, or unlikely. Each is treated equally seriously, with contrary objective empirical evidence marshalled, and corroborative references provided. It is the contrast between Hartshorne's orderly phlegmatic earnestness in the face of Bunge's chaotic absurdity that makes it seem like a Monty Python sketch. Point 2: to Bunge's accusation that Andrew Clark feared Hartshorne because at a joint seminar after Clark spoke, Hartshorne looked at the ceiling, and Clark became nervous and trembled, Hartshorne said it was because "neither of us wished to say more" (Hartshorne (1976). Point 6: to Bunge's accusation that Hartshorne was a bad loser, Hartshorne responded that he "lost often" at bridge, but he continued to "enjoy it win or lose" (Hartshorne (1976). Point 11: to Bunge's veiled accusation that Hartshorne was somehow involved in the harassment of Schaefer because of his socialist beliefs, Hartshorne said he neither knew he was a socialist, nor did he have any "conversation, or correspondence, of any kind about Schaefer with anyone at the F.B.I. or any other intelligence agency" (Hartshorne (1976)). At the end of the letter while Hartshorne (1976) half apologises for its length, as the great corrector he also points out that it was still not long enough to "complete the lists of facts that contradict [your] hearsay and fragmentary impressions."

Conclusion

In this short article I used Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to frame the epistolary relation between Richard Hartshorne and William Bunge. Like Felix Unger and Oscar Madison in Neil Simon's 1965 play (and later movie and TV series), they were the odd couple. Hartshorne was buttoned-up, fastidious, exacting, playing by the rules (Felix); Bunge was free-wheeling, careless, wild even, continually breaking them (Oscar).

Goffman (1959) developed his dramaturgical approach to make a larger point about how people presented themselves in everyday life. He suggested that there was the public self, which was how people wanted others to see them on the frontstage of life; and then there was their private self, which was how they were backstage, when they got home, kicked off their shoes, and had beer and chips. The intent of this short article was to use the private correspondence between two prominent 20th-century American geographers, Richard Hartshorne and William Bunge, to begin to present a backstage history of the discipline. This is not to replace conventional frontstage versions, but rather to augment them, to make them more complex and thick. Admittedly at times my extracts from the letters may have come close to a gossip column version of geography's history. What was important, though, were less the salacious tidbits, than revealing the many things that were deliberately kept off the frontstage, but found backstage, and central for a fuller understanding of geography's history.

Epilogue

While I was in the middle of writing this article, Richard Morrill, a friend of Bunge's from the University of Washington, and also a space cadet, contacted me to say he had just discovered that Bunge died in October 2013. Bunge passed away not in the United States but in Canada. He had become a Canadian geographer. This goes perhaps to another backstage element in Bunge's life. After his denial of tenure at Wayne State, Bunge came to the conclusion that where he could best kick off his shoes and have beer and chips was in Canada. He lived in Ontario for a period (1970-1974), making a living partly as a Visiting Professor, partly as a Toronto taxi driver. He

then moved to the Mile End neighbourhood in Montreal, with his final days spent at a care home in the Eastern Townships.

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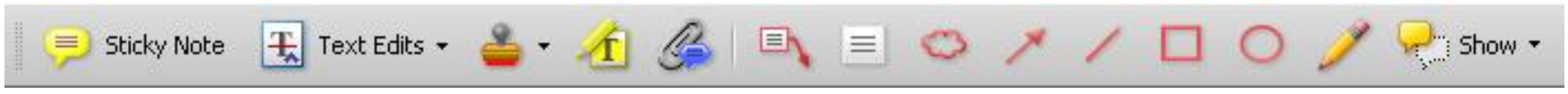
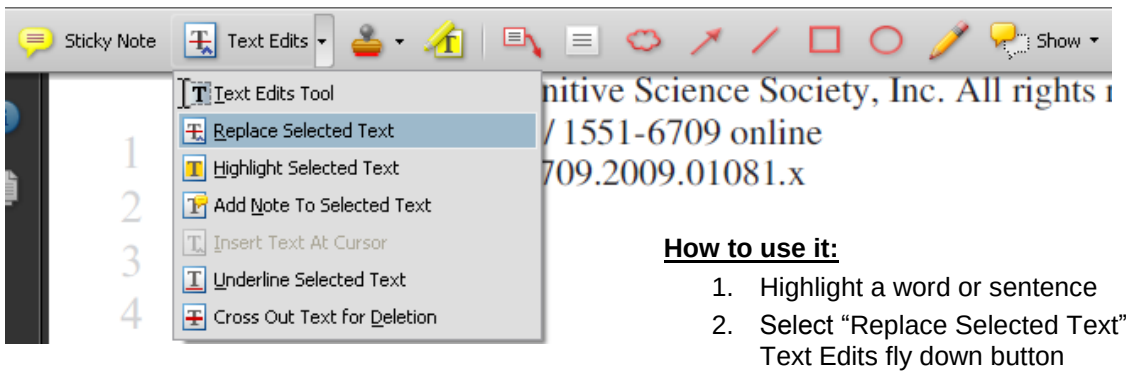
Once you have Acrobat Reader 8, or higher, open on your PC you should see the Commenting Toolbar:

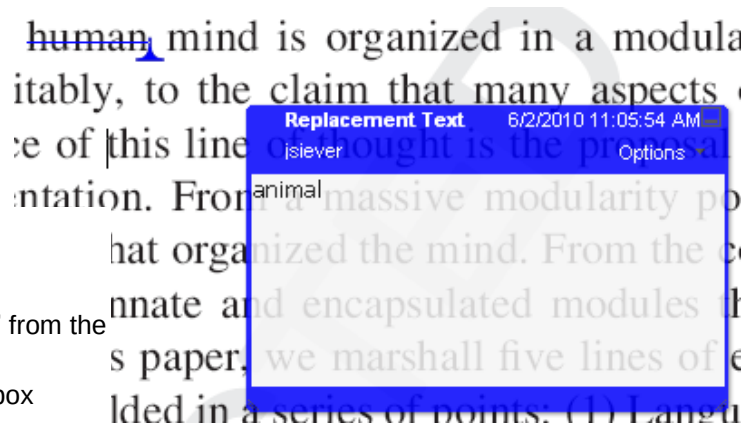


********(If the above toolbar does not appear automatically go to *Tools>Comment & Markup>Show Comment & Markup Toolbar*)********

1. Replacement Text Tool — For replacing text.

Strikes a line through text and opens up a replacement text box.



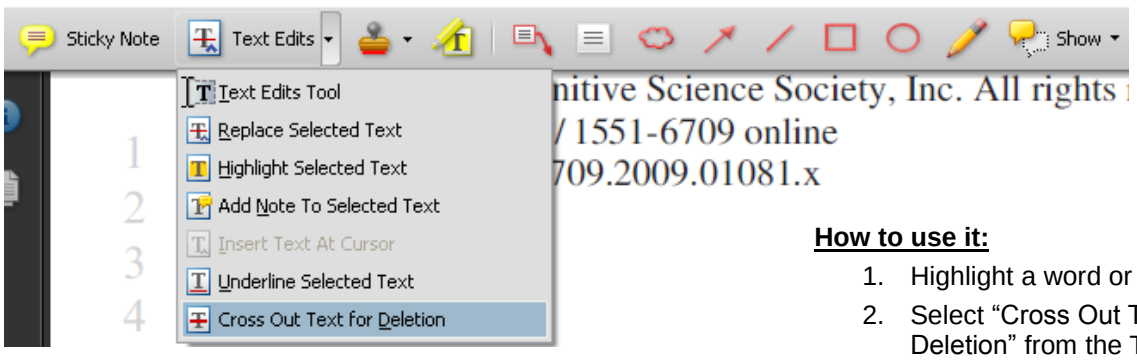


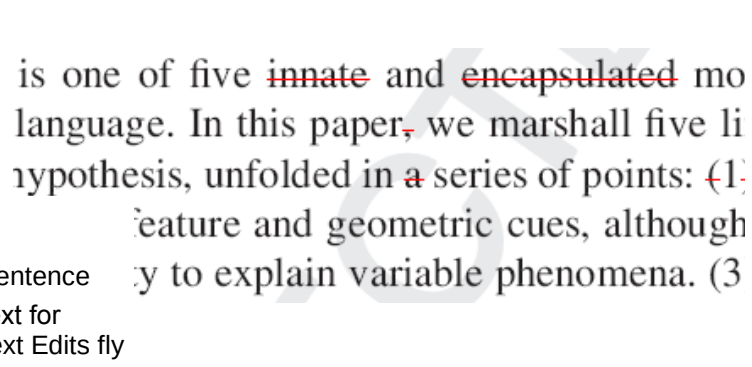
How to use it:

1. Highlight a word or sentence
2. Select “Replace Selected Text” from the Text Edits fly down button
3. Type replacement text in blue box

2. Cross-out Text Tool — For deleting text.

Strikes a red line through selected text.



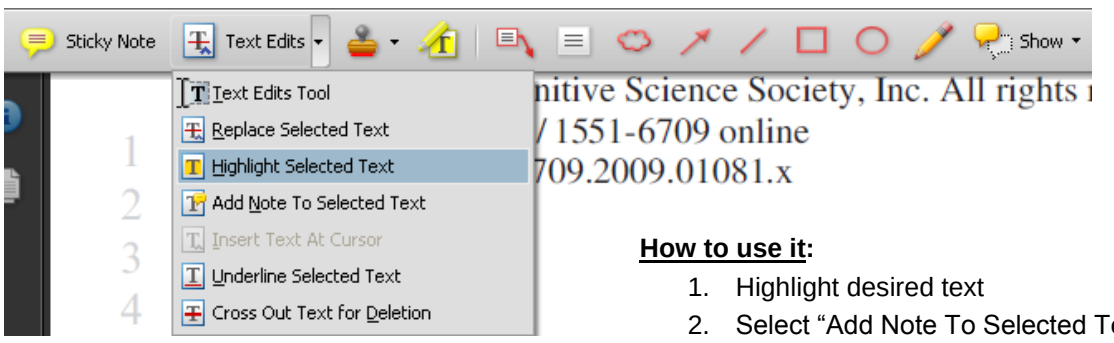


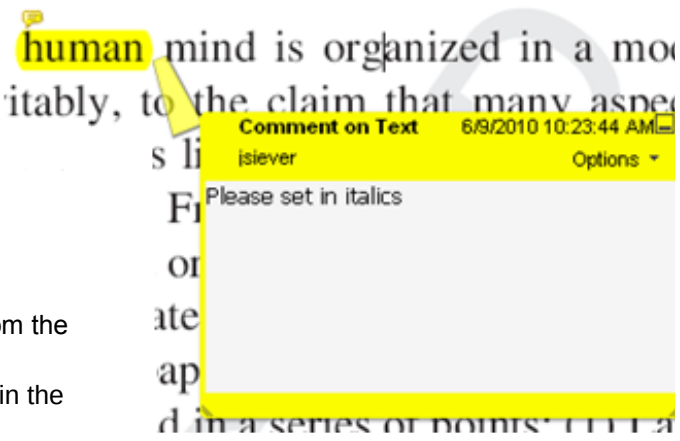
How to use it:

1. Highlight a word or sentence
2. Select “Cross Out Text for Deletion” from the Text Edits fly down button

3. Highlight Tool — For highlighting a selection to be changed to bold or italic.

Highlights text in yellow and opens up a text box.





How to use it:

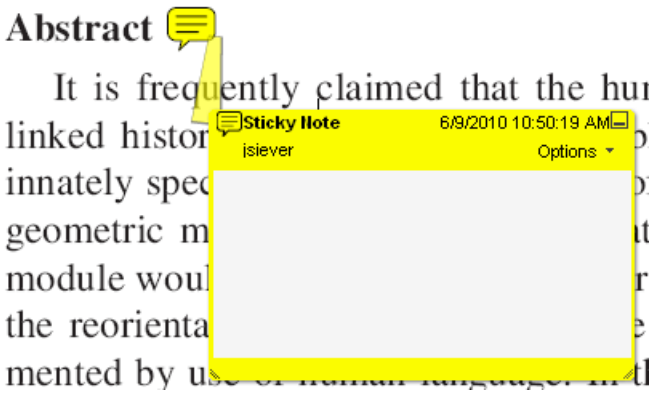
1. Highlight desired text
2. Select “Add Note To Selected Text” from the Text Edits fly down button
3. Type a note detailing required change in the yellow box

4. Note Tool — For making notes at specific points in the text

Marks a point on the paper where a note or question needs to be addressed.

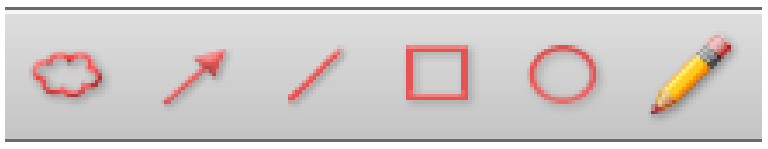
How to use it:

1. Select the Sticky Note icon from the commenting toolbar
2. Click where the yellow speech bubble symbol needs to appear and a yellow text box will appear
3. Type comment into the yellow text box



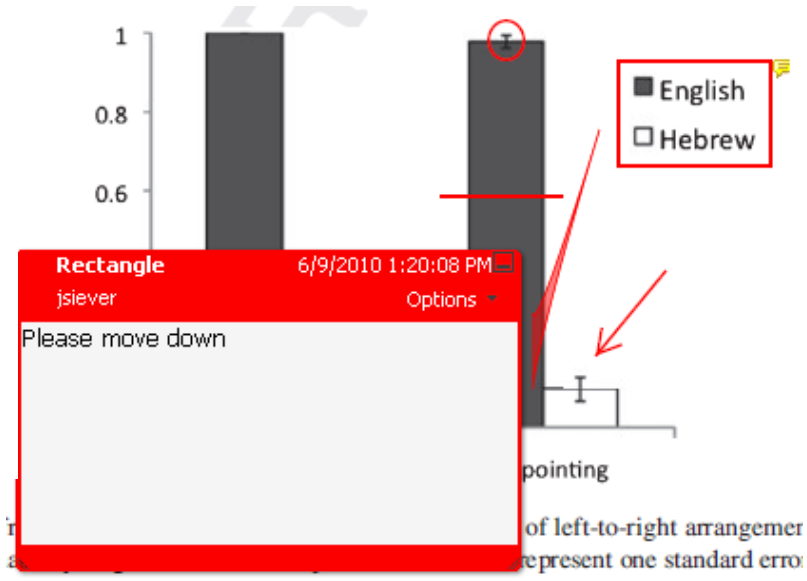
5. Drawing Markup Tools — For circling parts of figures or spaces that require changes

These tools allow you to draw circles, lines and comment on these marks.



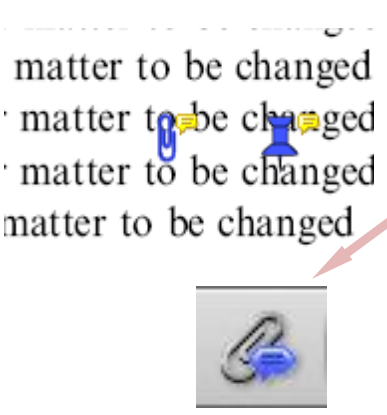
How to use it:

1. Click on one of shape icons in the Commenting Toolbar
2. Draw the selected shape with the cursor
3. Once finished, move the cursor over the shape until an arrowhead appears and double click
4. Type the details of the required change in the red box



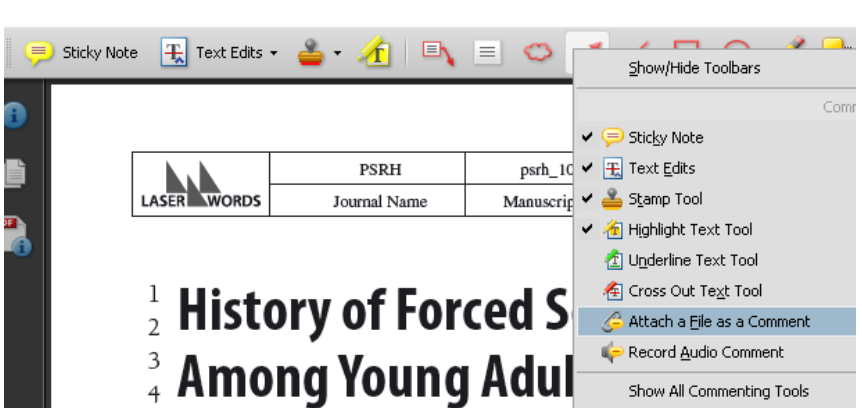
6. Attach File Tool — For inserting large amounts of text or replacement figures as a files.

Inserts symbol and speech bubble where a file has been inserted.

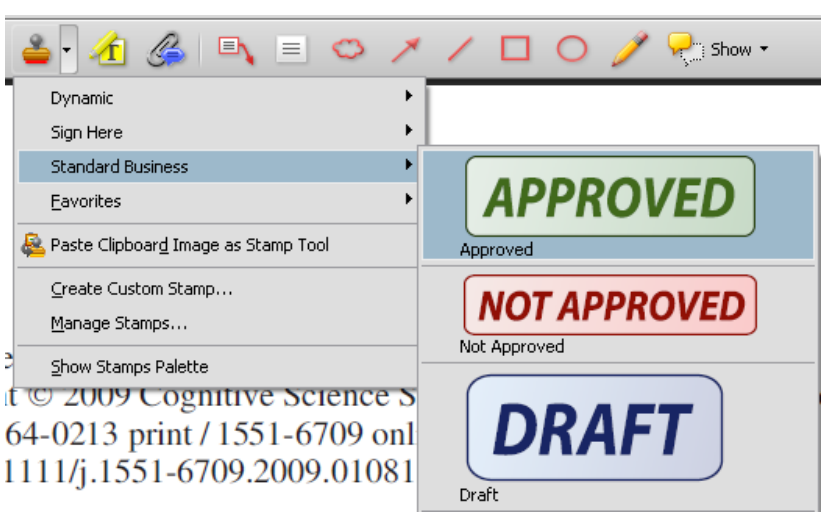


How to use it:

1. Right click on the Commenting Toolbar
2. Select “Attach a File as a Comment”
3. Click on paperclip icon that appears in the Commenting Toolbar
4. Click where you want to insert the attachment
5. Select the saved file from your PC or network
6. Select type of icon to appear (paperclip, graph, attachment or tag) and close



7. Approved Tool (Stamp) — For approving a proof if no corrections are required.



How to use it:

1. Click on the Stamp Tool in the toolbar
2. Select the Approved rubber stamp from the ‘standard business’ selection
3. Click on the text where you want to rubber stamp to appear (usually first page)

Help

For further information on how to annotate proofs click on the Help button to activate a list of instructions: