PLINY

A RESPONSE TO THE B2C “CULTURAL HEGEMONY” IN HUMANITIES COMPUTING

http://pliny.cch.kcl.ac.uk
John.Bradley - john.bradley@kcl.ac.uk

From Note Taking to Note Organising

- Pliny goes beyond supporting note-taking. It also helps its user to develop an organisational structure for his/her notes that facilitates their interpretation.
- A Pliny user organises his/her note collections using several different paradigms simultaneously:
  - 2D surface
  - Hierarchical (nesting)
  - Linking and Reference
  - Classification
- Pliny recognises that note organisation must start out being informal – users do not need to fit their notes into pre-existing coding scheme or taxonomy. Initially the researcher will not have developed a more formal structure into which the materials could fit.

From Note Organising to Modelling

- Pliny allows the user to use 2D space and grouping to informally organise his/her notes. However, I have begun to provide mechanisms that will allow the user to develop a more formal model of his/her materials – something that could be usefully exported as a "Topic Map", or as a set of RDF.

Eclipse and Pliny

- Pliny is built to operate within Eclipse environment – a tool framework originally described by its builders as “a kind of universal tool platform – an open extensible IDE for anything and nothing in particular.” (Eclipse web site until 2005).
- Eclipse’s plugin paradigm supports the largely independent building of tools which can interact in a multitude of sophisticated ways. It provides a richer model for modularity than the “data flow” or “common file format” approaches which have characterised much of his/her materials – something that could be usefully exported as a "Topic Map", or as a set of RDF.

Future Development

- Pliny is currently a prototype, not a finished project
- Pliny is available as open-source (through SourceForge)
- I intend to continue Pliny development as time permits after this academic year.
- I intend to explore the potential of plugin development for independent tool integration.
- I intend to research issues around what is involved in allowing a scholar to move through Pliny’s note organisation paradigm to a more formal modelling of the materials of interest
- Pliny’s development illustrates several of the challenges inherent in tool building for the humanities

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