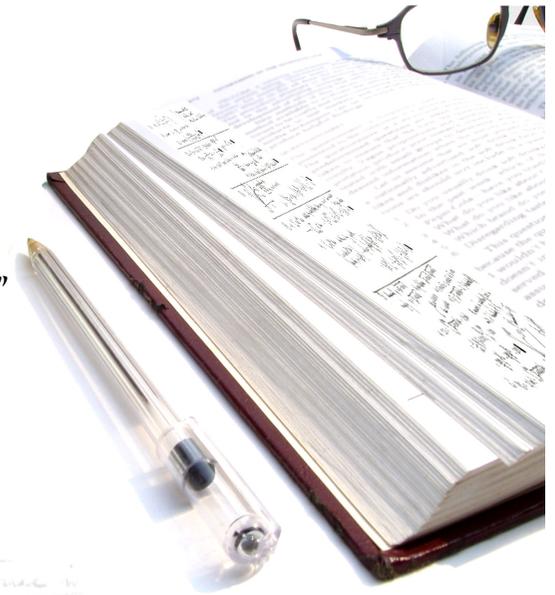
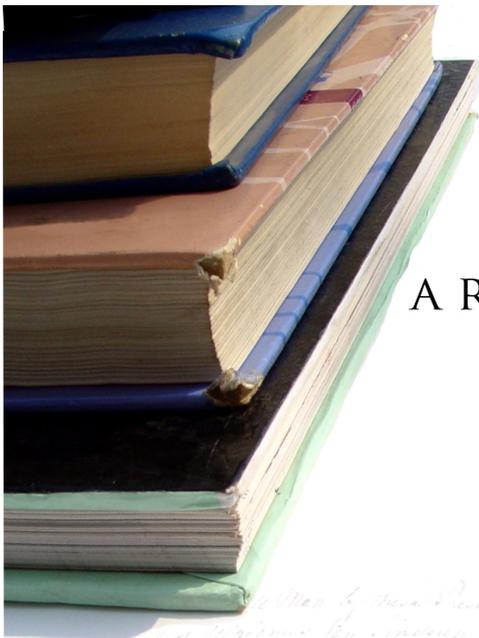


# PLINY

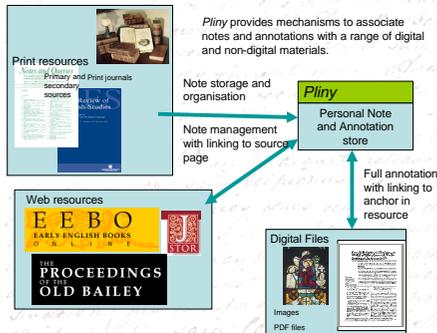
## A RESPONSE TO THE B2C "CULTURAL HEGEMONY" IN HUMANITIES COMPUTING

<http://pliny.cch.kcl.ac.uk>  
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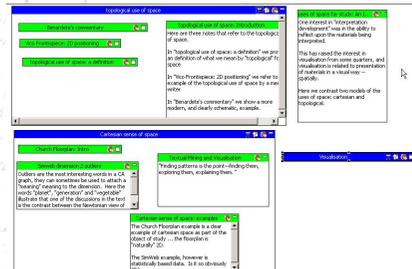
### What is Pliny?

- *Pliny* is a digital tool designed to support widespread established (and non-digital) scholarly research practice.
- It focuses on the scholarly acts of (a) reading and reacting to that reading, and (b) the development of an interpretation which arises from the scholar's reactions to the readings
- It aims to bring the benefits of computing to *existing practice*, rather than requiring the user to adopt new research strategies.
- It is designed to be useful with both digital and paper (non-digital) materials.
- *Pliny* is not a digital resource (like a web site): it is an *application* that runs on a personal workstation.



### From Note Taking to Note Organising

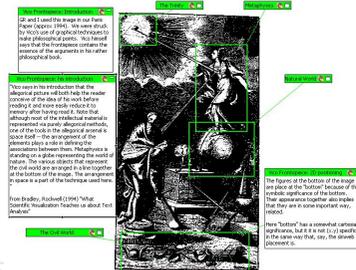
- *Pliny* goes beyond supporting note-taking. It also helps its user to develop an organisational structure for his/her notes that facilitates their interpretation.
- A *Pliny* user organises his/her note collections using several different paradigms simultaneously:
  - 2D surface
  - Hierarchical (nesting)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



A use of 2D space for layout and the availability of nesting of materials (for grouping together) supports *visualisation* of the materials to enhance the development of categories and their associations in the mind of the researcher.



The relationships between notes in *Pliny* is not necessarily hierarchical. Here, *Pliny's* containment view shows us that the note "users of space for study" appears in two containing notes – "Pliny: What's it for?" and "Strategies for managing notes". Similarly, "Cartesian sense of space" appears two containers.



*Pliny* supports annotation and note taking as the first stage of scholarly research.

### 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" approach which has characterised much thinking (including mine until recently) on tool modularity for the Humanities.

### Eclipse and Plugins

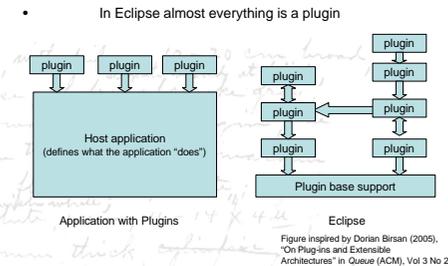


Figure inspired by Dorian Birsan (2005), "On Plug-ins and Extensible Architectures" in *Queue* (ACM), Vol 3 No 2.

### 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

### Acknowledgements

- *Pliny's* development was made possible by the provision of research leave for myself at **King's College London**.
- I am deeply grateful to KCL, and in particular to the head of CCH, **Harold Short**, for making this possible.
- I am also grateful to **Willard McCarty** with whom I have spoken from time to time about scholarly research and practice, and who has given me many useful insights.