

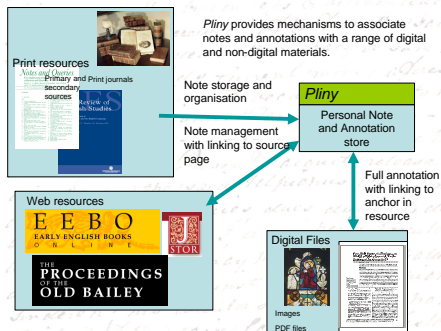
PLINY

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

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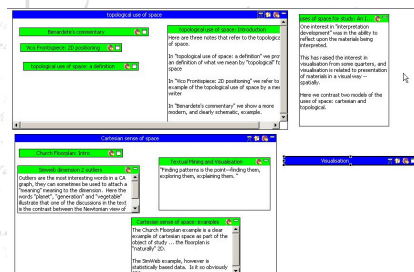
What is Pliny?

- *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.

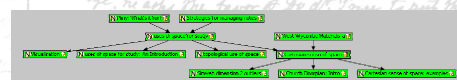


From Note Taking to Note Organising

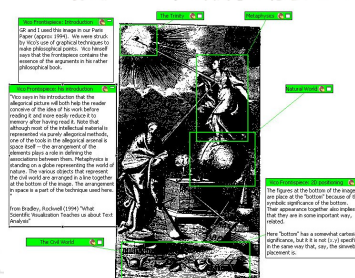
- *Pliny* goes beyond supporting note-taking. It also helps its user to develop an organisational structure for his/her notes that facilitates their interpretation.
- A *Pliny* user organises his/her note collections using several different paradigms simultaneously:
 - 2D surface
 - Hierarchical (nesting)
 - Linking and Reference
 - 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 "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

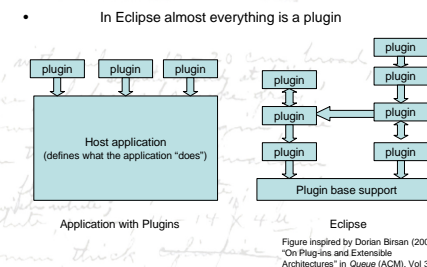


Figure inspired by Dorian Birsan (2005), "On Plug-ins and Extensible Architectures" in *Queue (ACM)*, Vol 3 No 2.

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.