Initial Use Cases

Use Cases
Bengal Oral History Project
Mapping Postcolonial Thought
April 25, 2009

Please see the PDF attachment for sketches of the screens.

The homepage of the site contains a welcome blurb about the project. The blurb explains what the major aim of the site it - it is an effort to map intellectual history, and to bring oral histories to the classroom. The aim of providing web-wide public access is mentioned. It's a visually pleasing site, and not overwhelming with lots of verbiage at the outset. There is an image as well, and a nice banner for the project.

On the tool bar, I can choose to learn more about the project, including the individuals and groups involved in putting it together, and the outlook for the project.

The next link in the tool bar leads me into the main portal of the site. I click on "Interviews" and I am led to screen "2".

But before I head to screen 2, I also note that there is link a place on the toolbar called "Contribute". I quickly click on that, and notice that I have the opportunity to email the project organizers with names of people who might consider being interviewed for the project. I can also make suggestions here. I go back to the homepage, and click on "Interviews" and this leads me to screen 2, as just mentioned.

On Screen two, I am presented with an alphabetical list of the interviewees names. There is a message above the list that says: "click on any one of the names below to begin exploring networks of major Bengali thinkers in the post-colonial period".

I click on "Partha Mitter" and next to the list, a dynamic conceptual web appears. It looks like the "visual thesaurus" or like the concept web that now appears when you do keyword searches on lib.harvard.edu.

The web shows the proper names of individual references in Partha Mitter's interview, as well as what other names these individuals have made reference to, in the case that they too were interviewed.

When I pass my curser over Partha Mitter's name, a pop-up window appears with his picture, and with a brief bio of who he is, where he lives now, when the interview was conducted.

I choose to pursue the interview with Partha Mitter first, but am interested in his connection with Tapan Raychaudhuri, since I have read a book by him. It's interesting that they know each other and I wonder when they met, or what reference they made to each other. In any case, I first want to learn about Partha Mitter, so I click on his name in the web. This leads me to screen "3".

Screen 3 is the Partha Mitter page. On the left I am presented with something like a Real Player device. On the right, there is a box that appears that reads "Transcript loading..." I press "Play" on the RealPlayer device, and I hear the interview beginning. As the audio streams, the transcript of what is being said scrolls from bottom-up in the window to the right.

I notice that there are keywords that are hyperlinked in the transcript. These are proper names of people, names of places, names of institutions, cultural concepts, events, etc. that are of historical importance.

I notice that presidency college is a hyperlink. I want to learn more about it, so I click on that link. The RealPlayer audio stream pauses, and another window opens up. This is screen "4".

Screen 4 is a complex screen, and I will get a lot of context here. This screen is called the "Map Center", and I could have also reached it directly from a link in the toolbar on the welcome page. There are three windows on this page. There is a historical note about presidency college on the left. In middle window, there is zoomed-in map of Calcutta that shows M.K. Gandhi Road, and various locations of interest on the street. I have the ability to zoom out. Presidency College appears, and there is a pop-up window that shows a contemporary image of the institution, and a link above it that reads "Cross Reference".

In the right-most window is something called the "GIS Center". There, I have the option of exploring the historical maps of Calcutta and seeing what happens when I overlay a map from 1783 on that area. I can overlay a map from 1954 too, and there are other historical maps I can overlay.

Also in this box is the option to add "private homes" to the map. And I note that Susobhan Sarkar's home appears. When I pass my cursor over Susobhan Sarkar's home, a brief info tag appears telling me that it was an important "adda" (or salon) spot, and a link also appears that says "Cross Reference". I will follow these "Cross References" later, but first I want to see what else is in the GIS Center.
I notice that I can overlay theatrical stages, archives, universities, galleries, schools, centers for cultural exchange, Muslim places of worship, Hindu places of worship, Christian places of worship, Brahmo meeting houses on to the map. I can apply any one of these layers and then zoom out to explore where the new institutions or locations appear.

I am first interested in following the cross references for “Presidency College” since I’d like to learn more about the importance of this institution. So I click on the original “Cross Reference” link that appeared with the image of Presidency College. I am led to screen “5”

Screen 5 has the title “Presidency College Cross References”. I could have navigated here directly by chooses the “Context” link in the tool bar on the home page. I see two sections to this page.

The first offers me a list of other oral histories in which Presidency College has been mentioned. I notice that Tarun Mitra has mentioned it, for example. I could click on that hyperlink, and I would be led to the Tarun Mitra Page. The section of the transcript would appear in which the first mention of Presidency College is made. I could press Play on the Real Player and listen to the audio stream for that section. The same for any of the other interviews where this college was mentioned.

Another section appears below. This lists other key terms that appeared in transcripts within 100 hundred words on either side of mentions of “Presidency College”.

I note that a number of other interesting keywords seem to be related to the college. I could click on “Coffee House” or “Gayatri Spivak” or “Susobhan Sarkar” etc., and I would be led either to an interviewee page, or to the Map Center, in case the keyword has a spatial referent, or to a page that simply gives me information on the key word. For example, Gayatri Spivak does not seem to have an interview in the archive yet. So when I click on her name, I am led to a page that gives me some basic information about her, but that also gives me the cross-references for interviews in the archive in which her name is mentioned. I can follow those links to that specific reference in the transcript and audio stream.