Association Press (looking at paper.li)

A response to a previous post caused me to take a (more) considered look at http://paper.li/ This site has apparently risen in popularity while I've been out of the social networking loop and has had mixed reviews.

For something to bubble to the top in social networking at the moment it must provide something unique or, at lest, uniquely convenient. Formspring did that by (in a just-good-enough-to-work fashion) encapsulating Q&A into the social network.

At it's heart, I think, paper.li is a *social network mapping tool*. Such a thing is far from unique and are usually only worthwhile as a curiosity. The aspect that sets paper.li apart is that instead of presenting the map in terms of the interconnected relationships it presents the actual content linked by that social network. It is the "sights you can see here" rather than the "map of the area." It is the leaves on the tree, not the branches and twigs.

As with all maps, it *condenses* information. Topography is reduced to lines on a paper. Many feeds are reduced to one feed. A network is reduced to a stream.

And of course this is all automated. As the site explains itself at the top: "paper.li organizes links shared on Twitter and Facebook into an easy to read newspaper-style format." So enter a twitter account and you will see the content (the "sights") of the network most closely connected to that account.

Here, for instance is mine for my twitter network: http://paper.li/WillBriggs

Is it useful? I don't know, but I would observe that you don't really get a sense of who I am – the person for whom this is the "Daily News" for. In particular:

- The extent of the content does not reflect the importance I would give it. The main photo today is of Bear Grylls, whom I happen to follow, and whose stream (within my own subjective sense of what is "interesting") has a high signal-to-noise ratio. But most of the other media on the page is from @abcnews which is a low-signal-to-noise ratio and seems to dominate. I wonder if paper.li has an ability to give a weighting to different links in the network?
- The arrangement of the content does not reflect the categories I would use. What paper.li calls headlines I would not call headlines; The things that are labeled "Tragic" and "Living" are not necessarily attached to things I would categories that way. Indeed, they are not even the labels I would use. Are they customisable? I don't know – but if so, it would mean a lot of work and reduce the automation of it all.

Perhaps I'm looking at it wrong. This is not an insight into me, or my network – but simply a different overlay of crossroads on the semantic web that is the Internet – another gateway to another series of pathways for me to wander down at my leisure.

So for instance, here is the paper.li daily for someone I follow: http://paper.li/peterould In terms of grappling with Peter's content and his own view his website is much more useful. Yet his "Daily" provides an enjoyable launch point into other networks, streams and feeds, no matter how distant they are from Peter himself.

My (initial) conclusion of paper.li then? Like a Sunday drive through newly discovered fields, it’ll be fun for a while.