In her paper, Donath describes the history of email, where it is today, and possible future applications of the technology. By giving the reader a very detailed background on email, she is able to transition very well into discussion about possible uses for finding hidden information about ones social network and other visualizations hidden withing email archives. Fairly early into her paper, Donath outlines three possible visualizations that she believes can be applied very easily to email: time based, social network, and topic based visualizations.

The time based visualization is just like it sounds. The idea behind it is to visualize information about how people use email. Thing such as the flow of conversations, average response time, and other information can determined through how people use email. Having this information visualized, could give people additional insight into themselves or their friends.

The second type of visualization Donath mentions is social network visualizations. This would provide users with information regarding their social network and location within it. Lastly, topic visualizations are possible with email archives. Information such as common topics or subjects, or favorite information shared between friends could be easily found and visualized within email archives.

Donath happens to mentions several visualizations that visualize the information that she covers at the beginning of her paper. Personal Map, a small feature of Microsoft Outlook, is one of them. It falls under the category of social visualization and would arrange all of your contacts in a screen surrounding the user, with the most "important" contacts being the closest. While certainly being interesting to look at, I'm not so sure this visualization provides anything more than that. I for one, have a pretty good idea of my email social network. Aside from being able to see the big picture of everyone I have had conversations with, I don't believe that this visualization would be bringing any new information to the table.
Social Network Fragments

At first glance, I wasn't quite sure what to expect from this paper. Judging from the way it was thrown up onto the website I wasn't looking forward to reading about the project. Fortunately, I was pleasantly surprised by this paper.

Right up front, this paper gives the reader a pretty hefty overview of social network analysis. This is to serve as both as background material, but also as a transition into talking about Social Network Fragments. While this takes up a pretty significant portion of the document, I felt like it prepared me as a reader to understand the project.

One of the first things mentioned, when the author discusses building Social Network Fragments, was the information used as input. Users were asked to "pre-compile", if you will, the information that was to be used in this visualization. I found this to be pretty significant. Understanding what information is going into the visualization is a great way to both figure out what is being visualized, and to figure out the intent of the project. In this case, the author wished to display social information as accurately as possible.

I found the completed visualization to be pretty impressive. The idea of representing the network as a globe of sorts, and implementing the "spring" system that utilizes gravity and repulsion was really cool. Something about the thought of representing information about someone's social world, in terms that govern the real world really impressed me. Likewise, the focus on the relationships between people was very interesting. Having differing levels of awareness and relationships add much more complexity and in the end more information represented in the final product. Lastly, the addition of time to the visualization gives the user a great way to see how their social world changes and evolves. That is something I think is very cool, and would love to try out myself.
Public Displays of Connection

This paper discusses the different aspects of online social networking websites. While accurately describing online networking, it became pretty obvious that this paper was already out of date. Even though it is only 5 years old, the online social networking landscape has changed so much since then that one could write an entire paper on the matter.

As a result of reading this paper in a hindsight perspective of sorts, I didn't find anything in particular about this paper shocking. However, there were a few things I disagreed with.

One of major things that I disagreed with was the idea that the main point of social networking websites is to make new connections. If you ask me, the main point of social networking websites is to maintain connections. I have not met, become friends, made connections with someone who was not already a connection. All of my Facebook friends are people that I have already met. As a matter of fact, I know this is the case with many of my friends as well. I feel like, in terms of getting to know someone, websites such as Facebook are terrible methods. While it is very possible to put up accurate descriptions of your interests and favorite movies, that in no way conveys the same amount of information about who you are as interacting with someone would. It may be a personal attitude, but I use Facebook to keep in touch with friends, both new and old.

One thing I found to be pretty insightful about this paper was the idea that social networking websites are a verification of your identity. I've played my share of internet games, and the same level on anonymity would be hard to come by on a social networking website. The idea that people connecting to you verifies your identity is pretty significant, and has the potential for further study.