Social Plumbing

Relationships are difficult. Maintaining relationships takes time, effort and intentionality which are more difficult to direct towards people with whom your primary contact is remote and digital. The goal of Social Plumbing is to visualize relationships in such a way that helps prevent them from being lost to entropy – flushed down the drain as it were.

The components of Social Plumbing are the following: Email logs enumerating when and with whom emails are sent and received – the logs of several friends or acquaintances can be viewed in tandem, and mutual connections will be shown; a point-line diagram showing points, individual contacts connected by a system of pipes, with the primary member or members (those for whom email logs have been gathered) surrounded by a halo of light; for each primary member, a “toilet bowl view” in which each relevant contact is shown either on the rim or in the bowl of a toilet. Relevance of contacts is determined by frequency and recentness of email exchange. Each email provides a small boost away from the center of the bowl, and passing time between emails causes a gravitational pull towards the bottom/center of the toilet. Those contacts who make it to the outer rim have temporary protection from gravity, as they are on a flat surface. We expect that most contacts will be jumbled and overlapping in the center of the bowl, so to prevent too much chaos, the number of contacts visible will be limited. Likewise, only connections that are on the rim will be shown in the pipe view. Ideally, the toilet bowl and pipe view will animate, showing the relative positions of contacts through time, but this implementation may only provide a static view.
Connections between circles will be represented as pipes, and the toilet will look more toilet-y. The colors will also likely change.