Artifacts of the Presence Era: Using Information Visualization to Create an Evocative Souvenir

The word souvenir is a good choice for describing Artifacts of the Presence Era because although it meaningfully captures aggregate information about visitor activity over time, I don’t find it fully practical for most types of data analysis or storage. As the authors point out, the sentimental value of most people’s communications archives is in their meaning over a large time span and usually not characterized by single moments’ worth of data. This piece retains what’s necessary for interpreting the most important of data and fairly accurately models geographic sedimentary activity. One improvement I would suggest is to provide variable delays for each snapshot (the one for each layer). The system described in the paper reacts to periods of major activity by creating thicker layers, but it could miss out on times where multiple instances of this type of event occur.

Children seem to show the most fascination towards displays like this, and it is no surprise that one is used in the prominent example where he sticks his tongue out and, assuming he knew that the system took snapshots at certain intervals based on volume levels and wanted to guarantee his photo’s inclusion, held that pose for a long time. The reading doesn’t mention a notice to the visitors that their images would be kept as a part of the exhibit, so I didn’t expect most other groups of people to so willingly be a part of it. In the museum’s context, though, the visitors were probably already interested in such a system and were glad to be included. Apparently this outcome surprised the authors as well, and it worked out to facilitate the proper buildup of activity snapshots in the museum.
Painterly Rendering with Curved Brush Strokes of Multiple Sizes

It was interesting to read about some of the subtleties of brush-painted art. Judging from the sample images, the results of running the rendering algorithm on a photographic picture look convincing. However, it is the collection of intermediate steps which is most surprising to me. In each iteration of the rendering, the output looks closer and closer to the final painting, but how it arrives there doesn’t exactly follow what painters really do. This deviation is most clearly seen in the first couple of steps (layers), where the image does look like a bunch of brush strokes, but many of those strokes are not where a painter would’ve put them. They look like averages of color in their surrounding areas, but that makes more sense in the purely data-oriented computer world. To human eyes something just looks wrong. I’m glad the authors reviewed some factors affecting how the non-photorealistic rendering looks to us. Overall, “Colorist Wash” and “Pointillist” look best to me while the in-between styles just seem weird. In the case of comparing “Impressionist” to “Expressionist”, I think “Impressionist” ends up better because it keeps the focus on detailed areas. The other style draws less attention to particular areas, and misses the points stated in the introductory paragraphs. “Colorist Wash” also mixes some unnecessary color into many of the strokes but not to an excessive degree.