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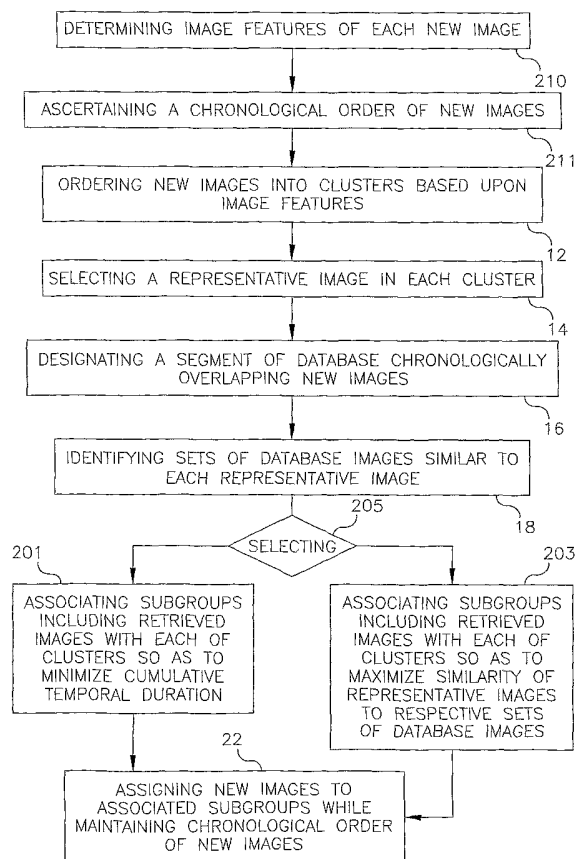
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(54) Title: ADDITIVE CLUSTERING OF IMAGES LACKING TEMPORAL INFORMATION



(57) Abstract: A database has chronologically ordered images classified into event groups based upon a time difference threshold, and into subgroups based upon a similarity measure. In a method and system for combining new images into such a database, new images are ordered into clusters based upon assessed image features. A representative image is selected in each cluster. A database segment chronologically overlapping the new images is designated and a set of database images similar to each representative image are identified in the segment. Different subgroups including one or more retrieved images are associated with each of cluster to provide matched subgroups. The new images are assigned to matched subgroups associated with respective clusters.

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**ADDITIVE CLUSTERING OF IMAGES LACKING TEMPORAL
INFORMATION**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to digital image processing that automatically classifies images and more particularly relates to additive clustering of images
5 lacking individualized capture date-time information.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

With the widespread use of digital consumer electronic capturing devices such as digital cameras and camera phones, the size of consumers' image collections continue to increase very rapidly. Automated image management and
10 organization is critical for easy access, search, retrieval, and browsing of these large collections.

A method for automatically grouping images into events and sub-events based on date-time information and color similarity between images is described in U.S. Patent No. 6,606,411 B1, to Loui and Pavie (which is hereby
15 incorporated herein by reference). An event-clustering algorithm uses capture date-time information for determining events. Block-level color histogram similarity is used to determine sub-events. This method has the shortcoming that clustering very large image sets can take a substantial amount of time. It is especially problematic if events and sub-events need to be recomputed each time
20 new images are added to a consumer's image collection, since additions occur a few at a time, but relatively often. Another problem is that consumers need to be able to merge collections of images distributed across multiple personal computers, mobile devices, image appliances, network servers, and online repositories to allow seamless access. Recomputing events and subevents after
25 each merger is inefficient.

The event-clustering algorithm described in U.S. Patent No. 6,606,411 B1 has the limitation that it uses date-time information from digital camera capture metadata. This is problematic if images to be added to a database lack correct date-time information. Examples of such images include scanned

images, digital image CDs from film capture, stills from video camcorders, or images from digital cameras with incorrect date-time settings. In many cases, the images have an associated date-time that relates to origination of a digital file after scanning or other processing, rather than date-time of image capture.

5 Many methods based on content-based image classification have been proposed for images where no metadata is available. In PCT Patent Application WO 01/37131 A2, published on May 25, 2001, visual properties of salient image regions are used to classify images. In addition to numerical measurements of visual properties, neural networks are used to classify some of
10 the regions using semantic terms such as "sky" and "skin". The region-based characteristics of the images in the collection are indexed to make it easy to find other images matching the characteristics of a given query image. U.S. Patent No. 6,240,424 B1, issued May 29, 2001, discloses a method for classifying and querying images using primary objects in the image as a clustering center. Images
15 matching a given unclassified image are found by formulating an appropriate query based on the primary objects in the given image. U.S. Patent No. 6,477,269 B1, issued Nov. 5, 2002, discloses a method that allows users to find similar images based on color or shape by using an example query. It is known to provide image retrieval from image databases using a variety of techniques. U.S. Patent
20 No. 6,480,840, to Zhu and Mehrotra, issued on Nov. 12, 2002, discloses content-based image retrieval using low-level features such as color, texture and color composition.

These content-based methods have the shortcoming of not considering another type of information commonly available with images,
25 chronological order. Images are commonly stored on media in chronological order. For example, images on a Kodak PictureCD™ derived from film capture are in order of capture. Filenames are often created for images using a numerical sequence or other sequence that results in a chronology. For example, some captured digital images have numerical suffixes in the filename that indicate order
30 of generation.

It would thus be desirable to provide methods and systems, in which new images are additively clustered in a database, without reclustering the entire database.

It is further desirable to provide methods and systems, in which
5 chronological order can be considered in additive clustering.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention is defined by the claims. The invention, in broader aspects, provides a method and system for combining new images into a database having chronologically ordered images classified into event groups based upon a
10 time difference threshold, and into subgroups based upon a similarity measure. In the method and system, new images are ordered into clusters based upon assessed image features. A representative image is selected in each cluster. A database segment chronologically overlapping the new images is designated and a set of database images similar to each representative image are identified in the segment.
15 Different subgroups including one or more retrieved images are associated with each of cluster to provide matched subgroups. The new images are assigned to matched subgroups associated with respective clusters.

It is an advantageous effect of the invention that an improved methods and systems are provided, in which new images are additively clustered
20 in a database, without reclustering the entire database.

It is a further effect of the invention that an improved methods and systems are provided, in which chronological order is maintained in additive clustering, even when capture date/time information is missing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

25 The above-mentioned and other features and objects of this invention and the manner of attaining them will become more apparent and the invention itself will be better understood by reference to the following description of an embodiment of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying figures wherein:

30 Figure 1 is a flowchart of an embodiment of the method.

Figure 2 is a diagrammatical view of an embodiment of the system.

Figure 3 is a flowchart of another embodiment of the method.

Figure 4 is a diagram of querying the database in the method of Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a diagram of data structure for a selected one of the subgroup associating algorithms of the method of Figure 4.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the method, images are additively clustered into preexisting event groups and subgroups of a database of images. The groups are organized on the basis of date-time information. The subgroups of the database are based upon a similarity measure other than date-time information. The term "date-time" is used herein to refer to time information in the form of actual dates and times or elapsed dates and times relative to a common standard.

In the following description, some embodiments of the present invention will be described in terms that would ordinarily be implemented as software programs. Those skilled in the art will readily recognize that the equivalent of such software may also be constructed in hardware. Because image manipulation algorithms and systems are well known, the present description will be directed in particular to algorithms and systems forming part of, or cooperating more directly with, the method in accordance with the present invention. Other aspects of such algorithms and systems, and hardware and/or software for producing and otherwise processing the image signals involved therewith, not specifically shown or described herein may be selected from such systems, algorithms, components, and elements known in the art. Given the system as described according to the invention in the following, software not specifically shown, suggested, or described herein that is useful for implementation of the invention is conventional and within the ordinary skill in such arts.

As used herein, the computer program may be stored in a computer readable storage medium, which may comprise, for example; magnetic storage media such as a magnetic disk (such as a hard drive or a floppy disk) or magnetic tape; optical storage media such as an optical disc, optical tape, or machine readable bar code; solid state electronic storage devices such as random access

memory (RAM), or read only memory (ROM); or any other physical device or medium employed to store a computer program.

The present invention may be implemented in computer hardware. Referring to Fig. 2, there is illustrated a system for implementing the present invention. Although the computer system is shown for the purpose of illustrating a preferred embodiment, the present invention is not limited to the system shown, but may be used on any electronic processing system such as found in personal computers and other systems for the processing of digital images. Consequently, the computer system will not be discussed in detail herein. The images used herein can be directly input into the computer system (for example by a digital camera) or digitized before input into the computer system (for example by scanning originals, such as silver halide films).

Referring to Figure 2, the computer system 110 includes a microprocessor-based unit 112 for receiving and processing software programs and for performing other processing functions. A display 114 is electrically connected to the microprocessor-based unit 112 for displaying user-related information associated with the software, e.g., by means of a graphical user interface. A keyboard 116 is also connected to the microprocessor based unit 112 for permitting a user to input information to the software. As an alternative to using the keyboard 116 for input, a mouse 118 may be used for moving a selector 120 on the display 114 and for selecting an item on which the selector 120 overlays, as is well known in the art.

A compact disk-read only memory (CD-ROM) 124, which typically includes software programs, is inserted into the microprocessor based unit for providing a means of inputting the software programs and other information to the microprocessor based unit 112. In addition, a floppy disk 126 may also include a software program, and is inserted into the microprocessor-based unit 112 for inputting the software program. The compact disk-read only memory (CD-ROM) 124 or the floppy disk 126 may alternatively be inserted into externally located disk drive unit 122, which is connected to the microprocessor-based unit 112. Still further, the microprocessor-based unit 112 may be

programmed, as is well known in the art, for storing the software program internally. The microprocessor-based unit 112 may also have a network connection 127, such as a telephone line, to an external network, such as a local area network or the Internet. A printer 128 may also be connected to the
5 microprocessor-based unit 112 for printing a hardcopy of the output from the computer system 110.

Images may also be displayed on the display 114 via a personal computer card (PC card) 130, such as, as it was formerly known, a PCMCIA card (based on the specifications of the Personal Computer Memory Card International
10 Association), which contains digitized images electronically embodied in the card 130. The PC card 130 is ultimately inserted into the microprocessor-based unit 112 for permitting visual display of the image on the display 114. Alternatively, the PC card 130 can be inserted into an externally located PC card reader 132 connected to the microprocessor-based unit 112. Images may also be input via the
15 compact disk 124, the floppy disk 126, or the network connection 127. Any images stored in the PC card 130, the floppy disk 126 or the compact disk 124, or input through the network connection 127, may have been obtained from a variety of sources, such as a digital camera (not shown) or a scanner (not shown). Images may also be input directly from a digital camera 134 via a camera docking port
20 136 connected to the microprocessor-based unit 112 or directly from the digital camera 134 via a cable connection 138 to the microprocessor-based unit 112 or via a wireless connection 140 to the microprocessor-based unit 112.

The output device provides a final image that has been subject to the transformations. The output device can be a printer or other output device that
25 provides a paper or other hard copy final image. The output device can also be an output device that provides the final image as a digital file. The output device can also include combinations of output, such as a printed image and a digital file on a memory unit, such as a CD or DVD.

The present invention can be used with multiple capture devices
30 that produce digital images. For example, Figure 2 can represent a system, in which one of the image-capture devices is a conventional photographic film

camera for capturing a scene on color negative or reversal film and a film scanner device for scanning the developed image on the film and producing a digital image. Another capture device can be a digital radiography capture unit (not shown) having an electronic imager. The electronic capture unit can have an
5 analog-to-digital converter/amplifier that receives the signal from the electronic imager, amplifies and converts the signal to digital form, and transmits the image signal to the microprocessor-based unit.

The microprocessor-based unit 112 provides the means for processing the digital images to produce pleasing looking images on the intended
10 output device or media. The present invention can be used with a variety of output devices that can include, but are not limited to, a digital photographic printer and soft copy display. The microprocessor-based unit 112 can be used to process digital images to make adjustments for overall brightness, tone scale, image structure, etc. of digital images in a manner such that a useful image is
15 produced by an image output device. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention is not limited to just these mentioned image processing functions.

The general control computer shown in Figure 2 can store the present invention as a computer program product having a program stored in a
20 computer readable storage medium, which may include, for example: magnetic storage media such as a magnetic disk (such as a floppy disk) or magnetic tape; optical storage media such as an optical disc, optical tape, or machine readable bar code; solid state electronic storage devices such as random access memory (RAM), or read only memory (ROM). The associated computer program
25 implementation of the present invention may also be stored on any other physical device or medium employed to store a computer program indicated by offline memory device. Before describing the present invention, it facilitates understanding to note that the present invention is preferably utilized on any well-known computer system, such as a personal computer.

30 It should also be noted that the present invention can be implemented in a combination of software and/or hardware and is not limited to

devices, which are physically connected and/or located within the same physical location. One or more of the devices illustrated in Figure 2 can be located remotely and can be connected via a network. One or more of the devices can be connected wirelessly, such as by a radio-frequency link, either directly or via a
5 network.

The present invention may be employed in a variety of contexts and environments. Exemplary contexts and environments particularly relevant to combining images from different modalities include, without limitation, medical imaging, remote sensing, and security imaging related to transport of persons and
10 goods. Other exemplary contexts and environments particularly relevant to modalities capturing visible light include, without limitation, wholesale digital photofinishing (which involves exemplary process steps or stages such as film or digital images in, digital processing, prints out), retail digital photofinishing (film or digital images in, digital processing, prints out), home printing (home scanned
15 film or digital images in, digital processing, prints out), desktop software (software that applies algorithms to digital images), other digital fulfillment (such as digital images in - from media or over the web, digital processing, with images out - in digital form on media, digital form over the web, or printed on hard-copy prints), kiosks (digital or scanned input, digital processing, digital or scanned
20 output), mobile devices (e.g., PDA or cell phone that can be used as a processing unit, a display unit, or a unit to give processing instructions), and as a service offered via the World Wide Web.

Referring now to Figure 1, in the method a plurality of new images are combined into an existing database of chronologically ordered images, which
25 are classified into event groups based upon a time difference threshold, and within event groups into event subgroups based upon a similarity measure. Features of the new images are assessed (10) and the new images are ordered or grouped (12) into clusters based upon those features. A representative image is selected (14) in each cluster. A segment of the database chronologically overlapping the new
30 images is designated (16). Sets of one or more retrieved database images similar to each of the representative images are identified by querying (18) the database.

Different subgroups including the retrieved images are associated (20) with each cluster and the new images are assigned (22) to associated subgroups.

The manner in which the database has been classified into event groups is not critical and can be automatic using an event-clustering algorithm or
5 manual or a combination of both. The same applies to the classification of event groups into subgroups. Manual classification can be used to determine the time difference threshold heuristically followed by automatic classification using that threshold. In a particular embodiment, the database images have been
10 automatically classified into events and sub-events based on date-time information and color similarity between images as described in U.S. Patent No. 6,606,411 B1, to Loui and Pavie.

The database supports content-based image retrieval using the same feature or features on which the similarity measure is based. In a particular embodiment, color matching based on histograms computed in each block of
15 images divided into small blocks, as described in U.S. Patent No. 6,351,556 issued on 2/16/02 to Loui and Pavie (which is hereby incorporated herein by reference), is used to compute similarity between images. This similarity measure has also been used to determine sub-event boundaries in the automatic event clustering method described in U.S. Patent No. 6,606,411 B1, to Loui and Pavie.

20 Alternatively, low-level features such as color, texture and color composition can be used for computing similarity. Color and texture representations and a procedure for similarity-based retrieval is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,480,840, to Zhu and Mehrotra, issued on Nov. 12, 2002 (which is hereby incorporated herein by reference). In this patent, the dominant colors of an image are
25 determined and each dominant color is described by attribute sets that include color range, moments and distribution within a segment. Texture is described in terms of contrast, scale, and angle. Similarity scores between two images are computed as a weighted combination of the similarity of the underlying features.

The new images, when received, lack capture date-time
30 information or have date-time information that is deemed untrustworthy. The new images can come from one source or multiple sources. For example, the new

images can be on a PictureCD obtained by scanning film negatives during photofinishing, image files from scanned prints, or edited digital images, in which capture meta-data has been inadvertently erased. The new images can be from a digital camera that has the date and/or time set incorrectly. This can be
5 determined automatically or manually. For example, date-time information, which indicates a date-time in the future, can be automatically ignored.

Referring to Figure 3, the reliability of the method is improved if chronological order information relating to the new images is used. In this case, features of the new images are determined (210), as discussed below, and the
10 chronological order of the new images is ascertained (211). The chronological order of the new images is maintained following entry and classification of the new images into the database. In other words, information about the relative sequence in time of the new images is used and that relative sequence is maintained in the chronology of the database after entry of the new images. (The
15 new images, after inclusion in the database, are likely to be interspersed with earlier incorporated database images. The database, after entry of the new images remains chronologically ordered.)

The chronological order of the new images is first ascertained. This can be done by extracting metadata associated with the new images. For
20 example, automatically-generated dates of file origination can be provided with the new images or the new images may have unique filenames inclusive of metadata defining a relative chronological order. A chronological order can also be ascertained based upon a physical order of images in storage media or by accepting user input designating the order. The ordering of the input images is
25 maintained throughout the addition process.

After the new images are received, one or more image features of each of the new images are determined. The determination can be manual, semi-automatic, or automatic. It is highly preferred that the feature or features used are the same as those upon which the similarity measure is based. In a particular
30 embodiment, the features are block-level color histograms described in U.S. Patent No. 6,351,556 issued on 2/16/02 to Loui and Pavie.

The new images are ordered/grouped into clusters based upon the image features. This ordering/grouping can be performed in a variety of different ways, but it is highly preferred that the grouping be on the same basis as the classification of event groups into subgroups in the database. This use of the same
5 classification procedure helps to ensure against the possibility of anomalous classifications, which could result from the use of different classification procedures. In a particular embodiment, the clustering is on the basis of color similarity in neighboring images as described in U.S. Patent No. 6,351,556 to Loui and Pavie, maintaining the ordering of the images.

10 A representative image in each of the clusters is selected. The representative image has a high similarity to other images in the cluster and can be selected on the basis of the feature or features used for the grouping of new images. The representative image can have a value of a similarity measure that is at or near an average of the same measure for all of the members of the cluster.
15 Alternatively, the representative image can be the image at the mid-point of the chronologically ordered group. Yet another alternative is manual selection of representative images of each cluster.

A segment of the database is designated that chronologically overlaps the new images. The segment can be the entire database, but is
20 preferably limited to a portion of the database. The temporal length of the segment can be limited based upon any date-time information available that relates to the new images. The new images, in most cases, will have a last date-time, which can be used to exclude from the segment a portion of the database between the new image last date-time and a most recent database image date-time. The last
25 date-time can be a date of creation of scanned digital images from prints or film, the date of receipt of the new images by email, or the last file creation date, for example. The last date-time can also be supplied by a user, for example as a response to an automatically generated question. (The user can supply the last date-time implicitly, for example, by choosing to use the method rather than
30 adding images at the chronological end of the database.)

In the method, the last date-time is no later than the most recent database image date-time. If the last date-time is later, then the method is not used or the new images are culled until a last date-time earlier than the most recent database image date-time can be established. Culling can be done on the basis of
5 user input.

A chronologically ordered segment of the database can include all images earlier than the new image last date-time, but to reduce computational requirements, it is preferred that a beginning date-time of the new images is also ascertained. If the beginning date-time is later than the least recent chronological
10 end of the database, then the segment can then be shortened by limiting the segment to database images having date-times on or between the beginning date-time and the last date-time. The beginning date-time can be ascertained in the same manner as the last date-time.

A representative image from each cluster is used to query the
15 database for similar images. The ordering of the query images is maintained with most recent first. A set of one or more of the database images similar to each of the representative images are identified in the segment, resulting in a set of one or more retrieved images for each representative image as shown in Figure 4. The similarity measure used here can be of any kind, and can be the same as that used
20 in the classification of subgroups of the database and the ordering of the clusters. In a particular embodiment, similarity based on block-level color histograms described in U.S. Patent No. 6,351,556 issued on 2/16/02 to Loui and Pavie is used.

It is possible for representative images to each match a retrieved
25 image of a different subgroup in the same chronological order as the new clusters, such that association of clusters and subgroups is trivial, but this is unlikely to be the case. In general, the problem of assigning the new clusters to the existing subgroups while maintaining the chronological ordering of the clusters needs to be solved algorithmically to resolve conflicts. It is currently preferred that the
30 algorithm either choose ((201) in Figure 3) matched subgroups to minimize a cumulative temporal duration of the matched subgroups in the case that the image

similarity match score is considered to have low discriminative power, or choose ((203) in Figure 3) matched subgroups to maximize similarity of the representative images and respective sets of database images when the image similarity match score is considered to have high discriminative power. These alternatives are
5 discussed in detail below.

The decision ((205) in Figure 3) on the method to be used is based on the distribution of match scores in the top m images for all the representative images combined. Relative similarities of the representative images and respective retrieved images are determined resulting in respective similarity
10 scores. A variance of the similarity scores is assessed using all or a predetermined number of the retrieved images having greater similarity to respective representative images than do the remaining retrieved images. When the variance is less than a predetermined threshold the greedy algorithm approach is used, since the match scores are not discriminative if they are tightly clustered around a mean
15 value. When the variance is the same or greater than the predetermined threshold the other approach is used, because there are significant differences between the level of match for images in the top retrieved sets, and in this case, the optimization step needs to take into account the degree of match in addition to the ordering constraints.

20 Other alternatives are possible, such as balancing these two goals or providing alternative outputs for the user to decide between.

Referring now to Figure 4, in a particular embodiment, a greedy algorithm is used in associating retrieved database images with respective new image clusters. A "greedy" algorithm is an algorithm that always selects the best
25 alternative at every given step based on immediate or local information only. The use of the greedy algorithm is based upon an assumption that the match score produced by low-level (color, texture, color composition) features cannot be used for fine discrimination between images; that is, only large differences in the match score are significant.

30 The sub-events corresponding to the top m images within the database segment, from each of the N retrieved sets are sorted by decreasing time-

stamp (most recent first). The value of m is an integer that is preferably between 3 and 20, for example, five. N is the number of new images in a cluster. Figure 4 shows the set-up of data for the algorithm to process.

The greedy algorithm is used to assign the new groups to existing sub-events ensuring the criterion that more recent sub-events are given a higher priority over older sub-events when assigning the new groups. This algorithm ensures that the shortest start to end time (time starting from the first to the last sub-event where a new group is added) that maintains the ordering of the new images is selected. The greedy algorithm for assigning the new images to existing sub-events is as follows:

Assign images of new cluster corresponding to i to sub-event corresponding to j , if date-time of j is earlier than date-time of sub-event to which images from new cluster ($i-1$) have been assigned (date-time of $i=0$ is considered to be the current date-time); and repeat for $i = 1$ to N and for $j = 1$ to m (where j represents the retrieved image groups, in decreasing order of time and where i represents the representative image of the new clusters, starting from the last to first). If $j > m$ (so no assignment was possible), note the number i as unassigned, and continue. Queries that could not be fitted into the segment are assigned to new events inserted adjacent to the nearest neighbor that is part of the solution list.

The second alternative has a dynamic programming algorithm that maximizes the match score, based upon an assumption that the match score is significant, in addition to meeting the ordering constraints.

The assignment that maximizes the image similarity score while maintaining the order of the new images is selected using the following algorithm following the dynamic programming paradigm. Figure 5 shows the data structure for the algorithm.

1. Arrange the top m retrieved images in decreasing order of time creating an array, A , of cells of length Nm as described below. Each cell, i , stores the data:

a) $Q(i)$: the sequence number of the query image for which this image was retrieved (the term cell label is used for this number).

Note that the sequence number maintains the time ordering of the new groups to be inserted, starting with the most recent image.

5 b) $S(i)$: the similarity score of i^{th} retrieved image in A with the query image.

c) $L(i, j)$: lists of length j , where $j=1, 2, \dots, N$, containing array indices of A. Let $L_k(i, j)$ represent the k^{th} member of list $L(i, j)$.

For a list to be valid, each member must satisfy the criterion

10 $L_k(i, j) > L_{k-1}(i, j)$. Each list $L(i, j)$ gives the best valid selection of retrieved images (one that produces the highest cumulative similarity score) of length j when the first i cells of A are considered. Note that many cells will have less than N lists, since it may not be possible to create larger lists that are valid. The

15 length of the lists is limited by the array location, e.g. at location i (where $i < N$), the maximum length of the lists can be at most i .

d) $M(i, j)$: cumulative score for list $L(i, j)$ given by

$$\sum_{k=1}^j S(L_k(i, j))$$

The goal is to find a set of cells in order with cell labels 1 to N that

20 produces the maximum cumulative match score.

2. Initialize $L(1,1)=1$. Construct each list in order as follows :

if $Q(i+1) < \min_j Q(L(i, j))$

$$L(i+1, 1) = (i+1) ; L(i+1, j) = \text{empty where } j > 1$$

25 (i.e. the first list contains the index of the current array location)

else if $Q(i+1) > \max_j Q(L(i, j))$

$$L(i+1, j) = L(i, j) \text{ and } L(i+1, j+1) = L(i, j) + (i+1)$$

(i.e. add a new list to this cell, keeping the other lists

the same)

else $L(i+1, j) = L(i, j) - L_j(i, j) + (i+1)$

if $S(i+1) + M(i, j-1) > M(i, j)$ and

5 $Q(i+1) > Q(L_{j-1}(i, j))$

$= L(i, j)$ otherwise.

(i.e. update list if better score possible with current assignment and it is possible to insert current assignment into earlier list)

10 3. The longest list generated provides the best assignment of the query images to retrieved images. If there is more than one candidate, the list from the cell with lower index number is the solution (since these assignments are closer to the current time). The new images belonging to the cluster corresponding to query q are assigned to the sub-event

15 corresponding to retrieved image $L_k(i, j)$ where $Q(L_k(i, j)) = q$.

4. If the length of the solution list $< N$, no assignment was found that would fit all the ordering constraints. In this case, queries that could not be fitted into the timeline are assigned to new events inserted adjacent to the

20 nearest neighbor that is part of the solution list.

CLAIMS:

1. A method for combining a plurality of new images into an existing database of chronologically ordered images, said database images being classified into event groups based upon a time difference threshold, and within
5 event groups into event subgroups based upon a similarity measure, said method comprising the steps of:
- assessing one or more image features of each of said new images;
ordering said new images into clusters based upon said image
10 features;
 - selecting a representative image in each of said clusters;
designating a segment of said database images chronologically
overlapping said new images;
15 identifying in said segment, a set of one or more of said database images similar to each of said representative images to provide sets of retrieved images;
 - associating different event subgroups including one or more of said
retrieved images with each of said clusters to provide matched subgroups;
assigning said new images to said matched subgroups associated
with respective said clusters.
20
2. A method for combining a plurality of new images into an existing database of chronologically ordered images, said database images being classified into event groups based upon a time difference threshold, and within
25 event groups into event subgroups based upon a similarity measure, said method comprising the steps of:
- determining one or more image features of each of said new
images;
 - ascertaining a chronological order of said new images;
ordering said new images into clusters based upon said image
30 features;
 - selecting a representative image in each of said clusters;

designating a segment of said database images chronologically
overlapping said new images;
identifying in said segment, a set of one or more of said database
images similar to each of said representative images to provide sets of retrieved
5 images;
associating different event subgroups including one or more of said
retrieved images with each of said clusters to provide matched subgroups;
assigning said new images to said matched subgroups associated
with respective said clusters; and
10 during said assigning, maintaining said chronological order of said
new images.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein said ascertaining further
comprises assigning said new images a chronological order based upon metadata
15 associated with said new images.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein said metadata are automatically-
generated dates of file origination.

20 5. The method of claim 3 wherein said new images have unique
filenames inclusive of metadata defining said chronological order and said
ascertaining further comprises extracting said metadata.

6. The method of claim 2 wherein said ascertaining further
25 comprises assigning said new images a chronological order based upon a physical
order of said images upon storage media.

7. The method of claim 2 wherein said ascertaining further
comprises accepting user input designating said chronological order.

30

8. The method of claim 2 wherein said database defines a most recent database image date-time and said designating further comprises determining a last date-time of said new images, said last date-time being no later than said most recent database image date-time.

5

9. The method of claim 8 wherein said determining further comprises ascertaining a beginning date-time of said new images; and said designating further comprises limiting said segment to database images on or between said beginning date-time and said last date-time.

10

10. The method of claim 9 wherein said ascertaining further comprises accepting user input designating said beginning date-time.

11. The method of claim 2 further comprising, during said associating, choosing said matched subgroups to minimize a cumulative temporal duration of said matched subgroups.

15

12. The method of claim 11 wherein said choosing further comprises using a greedy algorithm.

20

13. The method of claim 2 further comprising, during said associating, choosing said matched subgroups to maximize similarity of said representative images and respective said sets of database images.

25

14. The method of claim 2 further comprising, prior to said associating, selecting one of:

choosing said matched subgroups to minimize a cumulative temporal duration of said matched subgroups; and

choosing said matched subgroups to maximize similarity of said representative images and respective said sets of database images; and applying the selected choosing step during said associating.

30

15. The method of claim 2 wherein said selecting further comprises:

determining relative similarities of said representative images and respective said retrieved images to provide respective similarity scores;
5 assessing a variance of said similarity scores;
using said first choosing step when said variance is less than a predetermined threshold; and
using said second choosing step when said variance is not less than said predetermined threshold.

10

16. The method of claim 2 wherein said assessing further comprises computing a variance of a predetermined number of said retrieved images having greater similarity to respective said representative images than remaining said retrieved images.

15

17. The method of claim 2 wherein said segment includes all of said database images chronologically earlier than a last date-time of said new images.

20

18. The method of claim 2 wherein said determining of said features of said new images is automatic.

19. A system for combining a plurality of new images into an existing database of chronologically ordered images, said database images being
25 classified into event groups based upon a time difference threshold, and within event groups into event subgroups based upon a similarity measure, said system comprising:

means for determining one or more image features of each of said new images;

30

means for ascertaining a chronological order of said new images;

means for ordering said new images into clusters based upon said image features;

means for selecting a representative image in each of said clusters;

means for designating a segment of said database images

5 chronologically overlapping said new images;

means for identifying in said segment, a set of one or more of said database images similar to each of said representative images to provide sets of retrieved images;

10 means for associating different event subgroups including one or more of said retrieved images with each of said clusters to provide matched subgroups;

means for assigning said new images to said matched subgroups associated with respective said clusters while maintaining said chronological order of said new images.

15

20. A computer program product for combining a plurality of new images into an existing database of chronologically ordered images, said database images being classified into event groups based upon a time difference threshold, and within event groups into event subgroups based upon a similarity measure, the computer program product comprising computer readable storage medium having a computer program stored thereon for performing the steps of:

20

determining one or more image features of each of said new images;

25

ascertaining a chronological order of said new images;

ordering said new images into clusters based upon said image features;

selecting a representative image in each of said clusters;

designating a segment of said database images chronologically overlapping said new images;

30

identifying in said segment, a set of one or more of said database images similar to each of said representative images to provide sets of retrieved images;

5 associating different event subgroups including one or more of said retrieved images with each of said clusters to provide matched subgroups;

assigning said new images to said matched subgroups associated with respective said clusters; and

during said assigning, maintaining said chronological order of said new images.

10

1/4

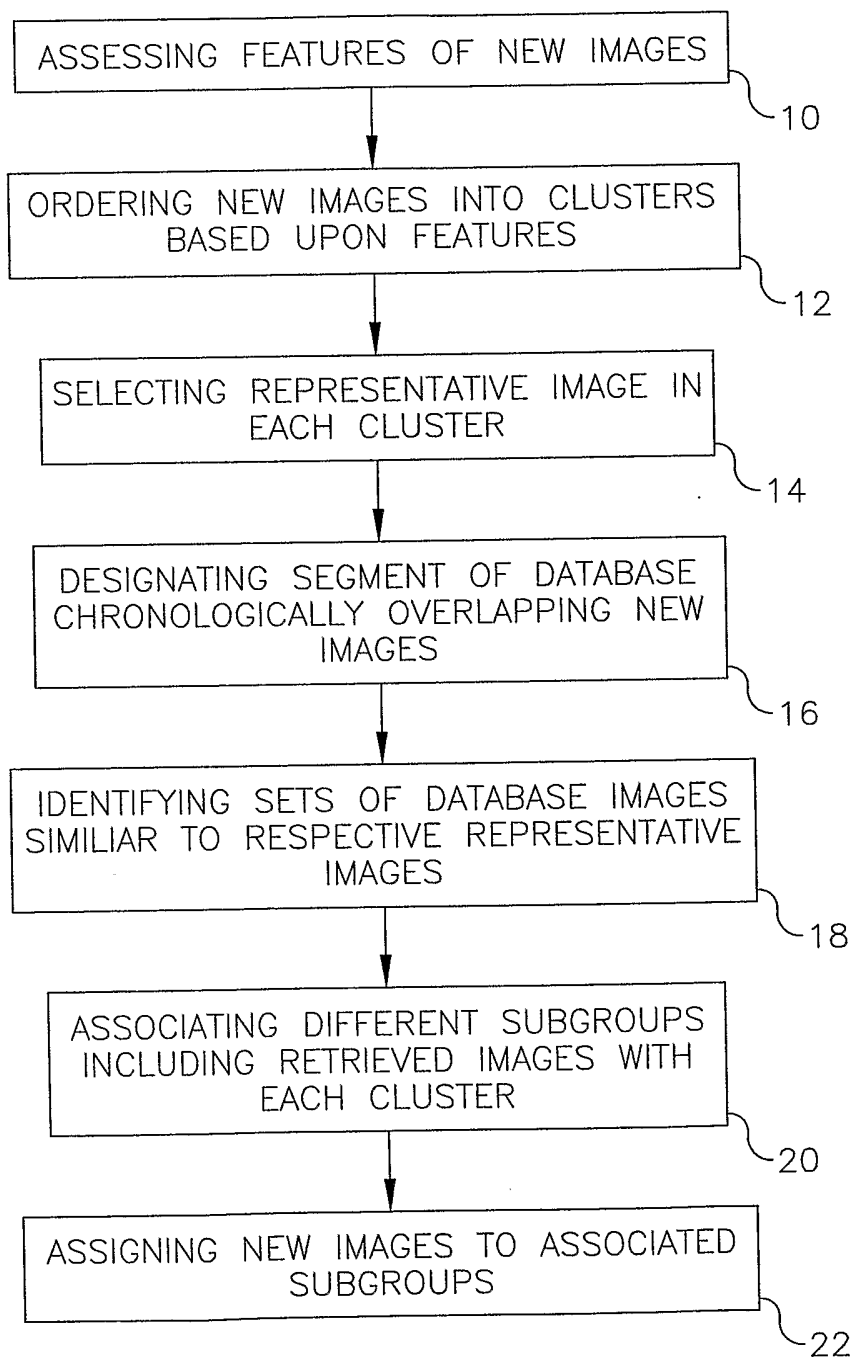


FIG. 1

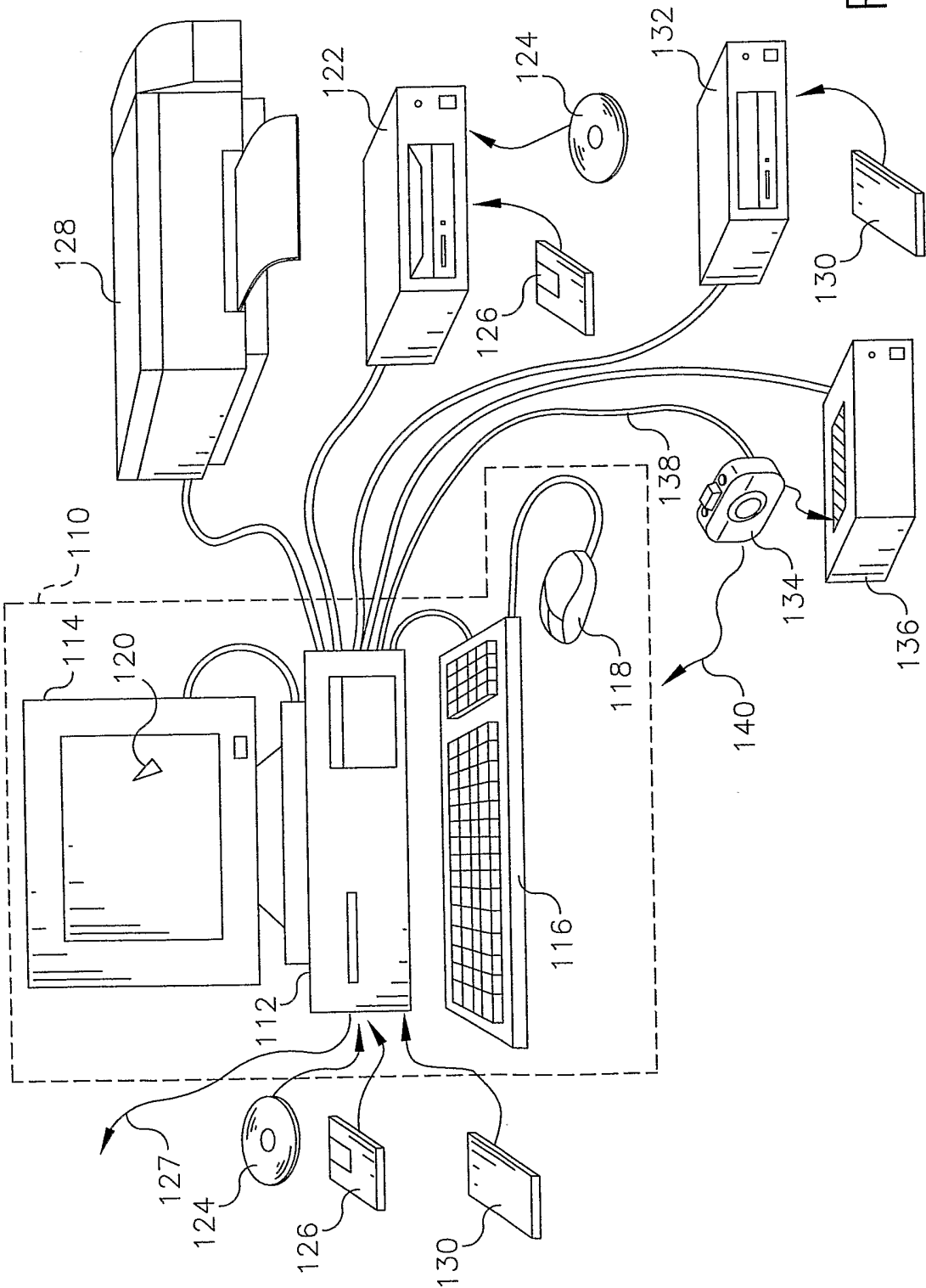


FIG. 2

3/4

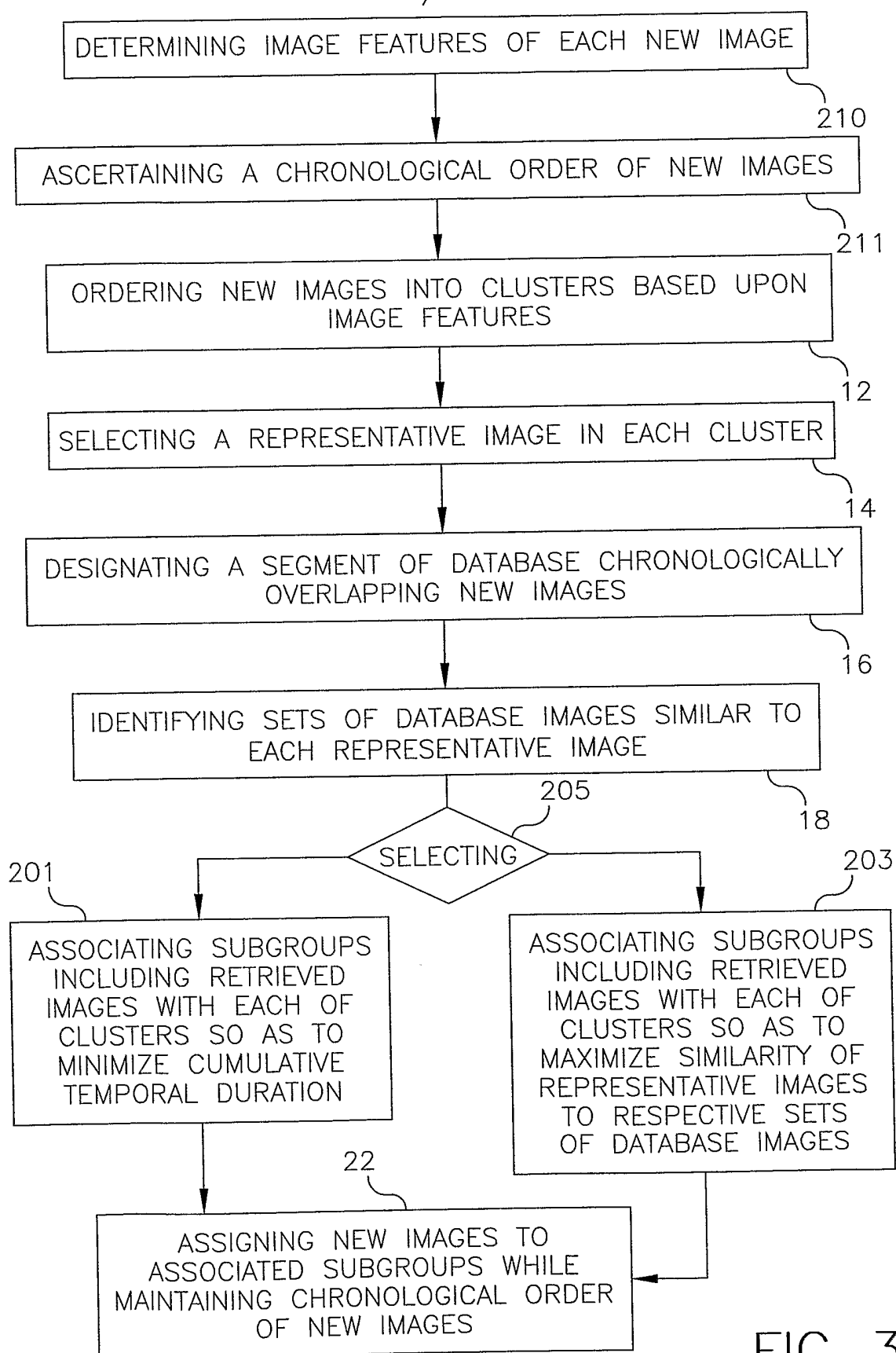


FIG. 3

4/4

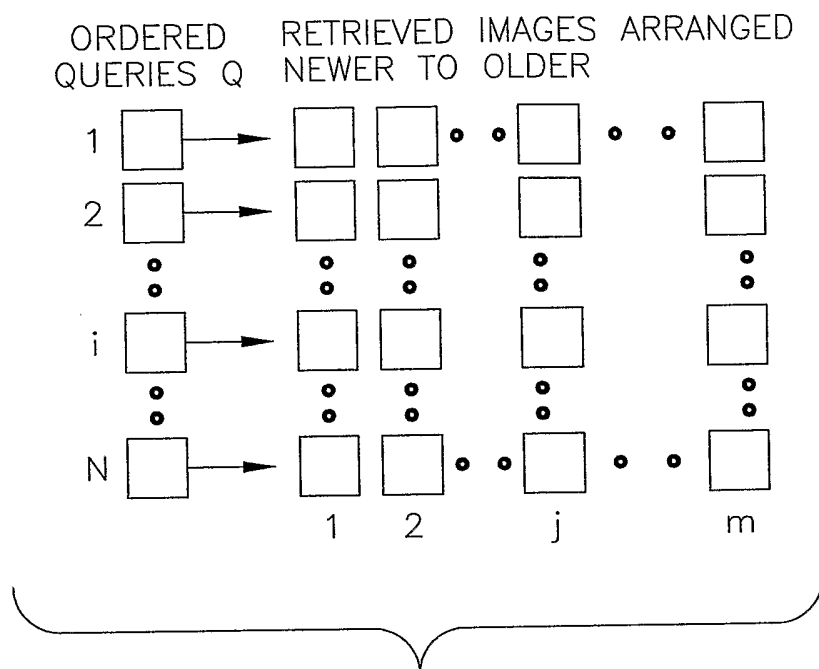


FIG. 4

ARRAY A : $N \times m$ RETRIEVED IMAGES ARRANGED
NEWER TO OLDER

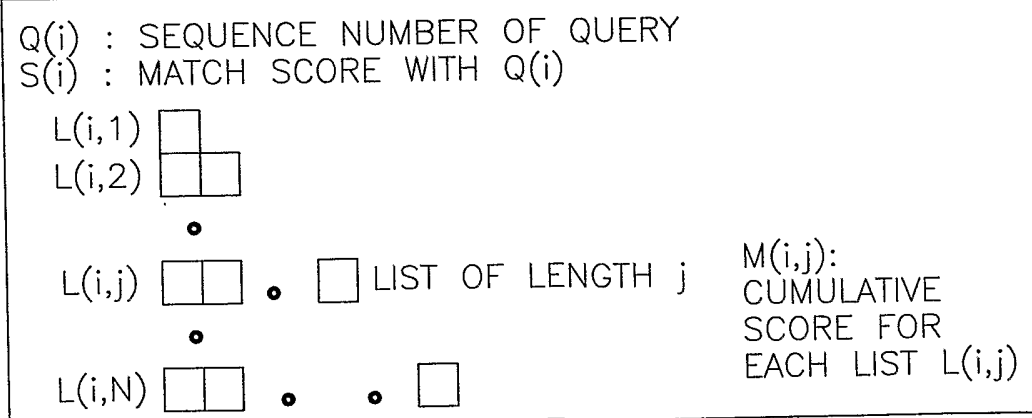
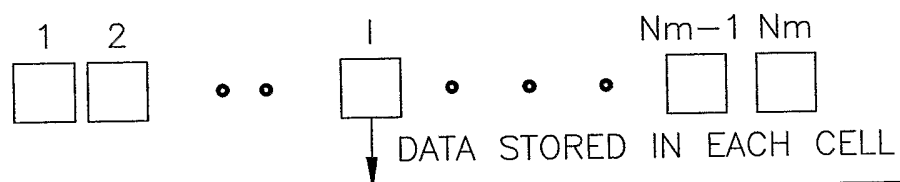


FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2006/006990

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. G06F17/30

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, INSPEC

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	<p>PLATT J C ET AL: "PhotoTOC: automatic clustering for browsing personal photographs"</p> <p>INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND SIGNAL PROCESSING, 2003 AND FOURTH PACIFIC RIM CONFERENCE ON MULTIMEDIA. PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2003 JOINT CONFERENCE OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SINGAPORE 15-18 DEC. 2003, PISCATAWAY, NJ, USA, IEEE, vol. 1, 15 December 2003 (2003-12-15), pages 6-10, XP010702837</p> <p>ISBN: 0-7803-8185-8</p> <p>page 7, left-hand column, paragraph 4 - right-hand column, last paragraph</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-/--</p>	1-20

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☒ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
- *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

- *T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
- *X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
- *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
- *&* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

23 June 2006

Date of mailing of the international search report

03/07/2006

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2006/006990

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 2002/183966 A1 (MISHRA NINA ET AL) 5 December 2002 (2002-12-05) figure 6 paragraph [0056] -----	1-20
A	LOUI A C ET AL: "Automated event clustering and quality screening of consumer pictures for digital albuming" IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON MULTIMEDIA, IEEE SERVICE CENTER, PISCATAWAY, NJ, US, vol. 5, no. 3, September 2003 (2003-09), pages 390-402, XP002374762 ISSN: 1520-9210 page 390, right-hand column, last paragraph - page 391, left-hand column, paragraph 2 page 392, left-hand column, paragraph 2 - page 394, right-hand column, paragraph 1 -----	1-20
A	US 6 606 411 B1 (LOUI ALEXANDER C ET AL) 12 August 2003 (2003-08-12) cited in the application the whole document -----	1-20
A	US 6 351 556 B1 (LOUI ALEXANDER C ET AL) 26 February 2002 (2002-02-26) cited in the application the whole document -----	1-20

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2006/006990

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 2002183966 A1	05-12-2002	US 2004122797 A1	24-06-2004
US 6606411 B1	12-08-2003	EP 0990996 A2	05-04-2000
		JP 2000112997 A	21-04-2000
		US 2003198390 A1	23-10-2003
US 6351556 B1	26-02-2002	NONE	