



ConTour

Boston: Renewed Vistas

ConTour is an example of a "software editor," a system that dynamically determines the next material to display based on the viewer's interests and those materials shown in the past.

The system reads in a collection of video clips and still pictures, each described by a list of keywords by the author. The program then displays thumbnail pictures of these materials in the center of the screen surrounded by the complete set of keywords. In this story, keywords are broken down into four groups representing people, times, places, and themes.

When a particular material is displayed, its keywords are activated. As a result, other materials that share those keywords also become activated. The system decides what material to show next simply by choosing the one that's most active.

In this way, the system operates on a simple positive feedback principle: the more the viewer sees about particular people, times, places, and themes, the more likely they are to see other materials about those same things.

The viewer can steer this presentation by activating any of the keywords by clicking on them. Viewers thus interact as much or as little as they want to; ConTour supports a range of activities from passive watching and browsing to highly directed searching.