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(54) THREAD INTERCEPTION AND ANALYSIS

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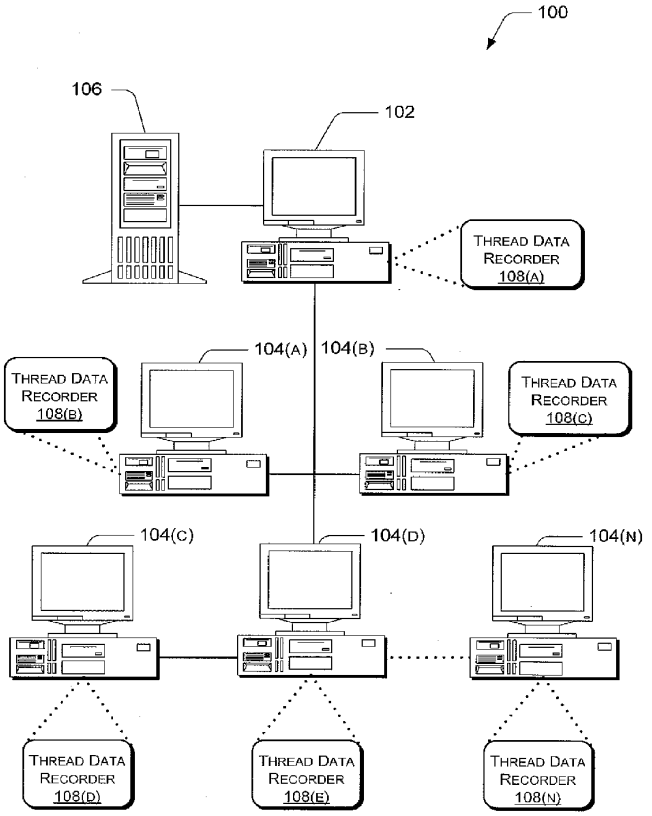
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Apparatus and methods for intercepting and analyzing threads are disclosed. In one embodiment, a thread data recorder is configured to instrument one or more existing functions by modifying computer executable instructions in the functions to intercept threads calling the functions. In one possible implementation, the number of existing functions instrumented can be reduced by instrumenting choke point functions. The instrumented functions can also capture data associated with the threads as the threads execute at the function. This data can be saved to memory and compressed into logs. In one aspect, the data can be saved and/or compressed at a time when processor resources are being used at or below a predetermined level. The captured data can be used to analyze a functioning of a computer system in which the threads were produced.



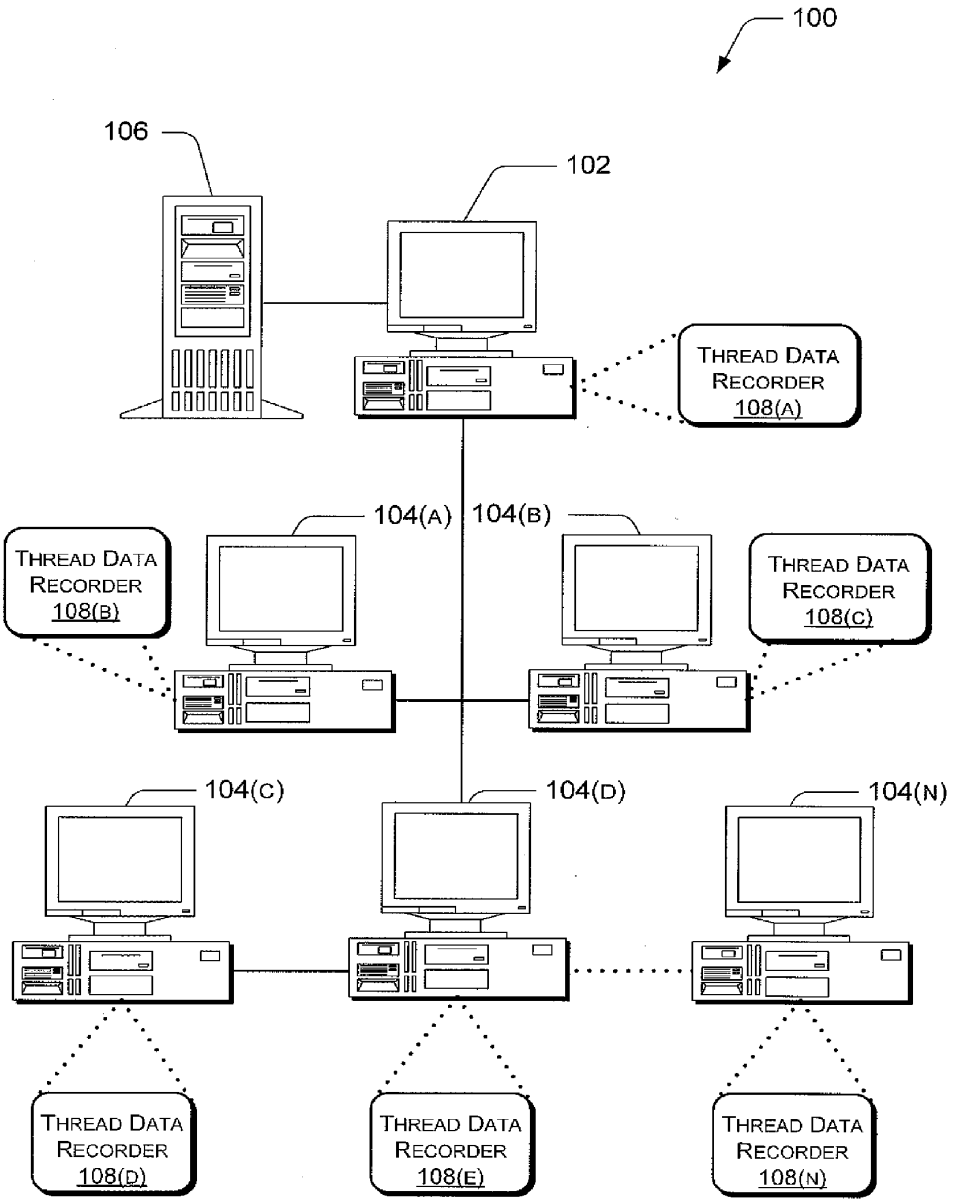

100
106
102
THREAD DATA RECORDER 108(A)
104(A)
104(B)
THREAD DATA RECORDER 108(B)
THREAD DATA RECORDER 108(C)
104(C)
104(D)
104(N)
THREAD DATA RECORDER 108(D)
THREAD DATA RECORDER 108(E)
THREAD DATA RECORDER 108(N)

Fig. 1

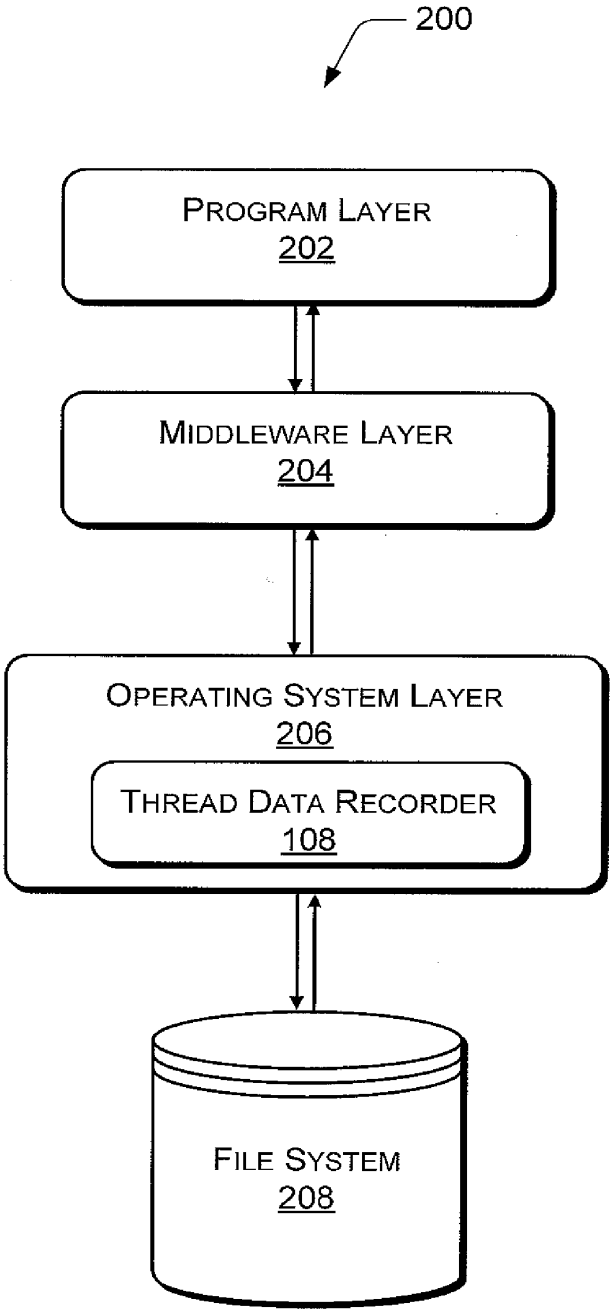

200
PROGRAM LAYER
202
MIDDLEWARE LAYER
204
OPERATING SYSTEM LAYER
206
THREAD DATA RECORDER
108
FILE SYSTEM
208

Fig. 2

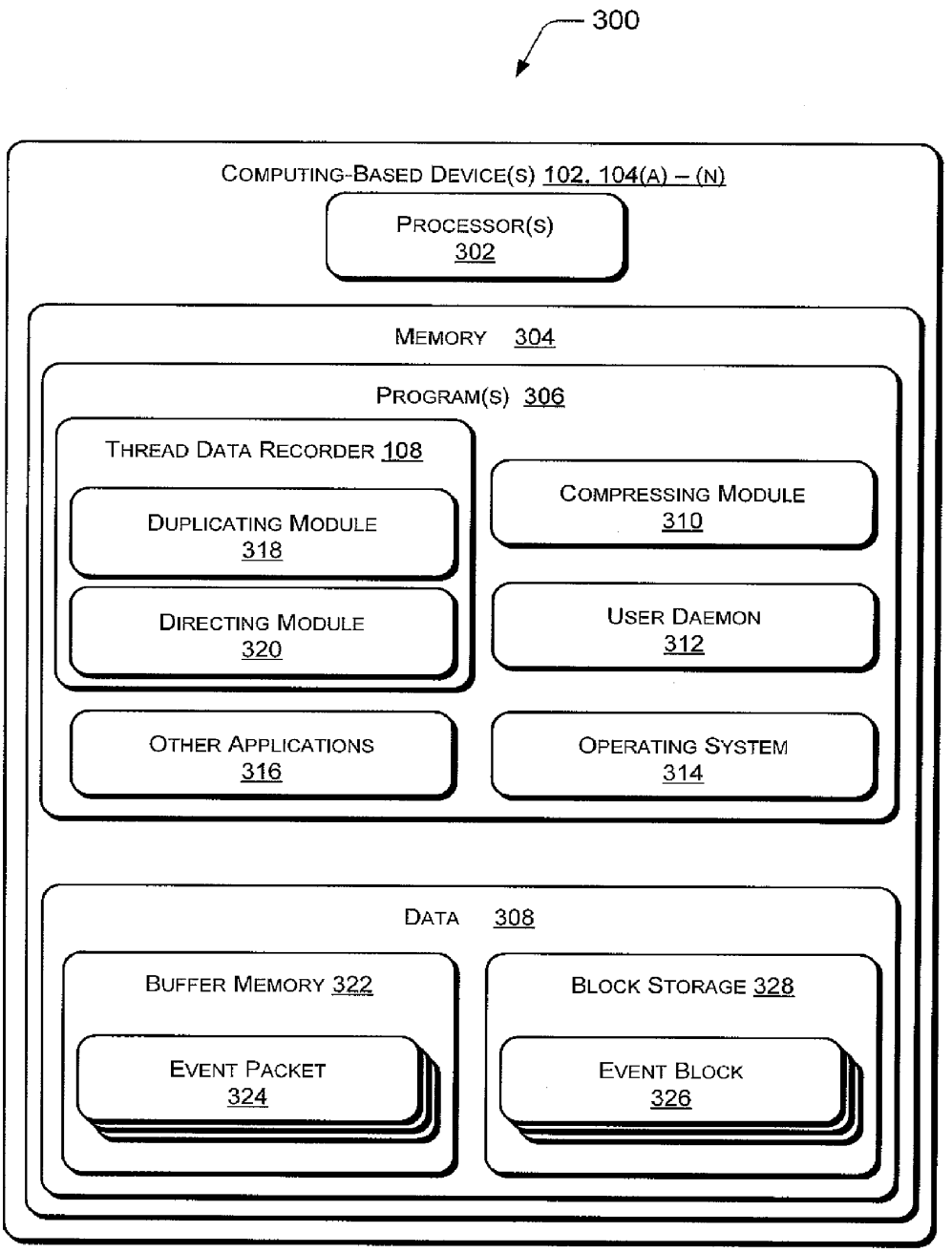

300
COMPUTING-BASED DEVICE(S) 102, 104(A) – (N)
PROCESSOR(S) 302
MEMORY 304
PROGRAM(S) 306
THREAD DATA RECORDER 108
DUPLICATING MODULE 318
DIRECTING MODULE 320
COMPRESSING MODULE 310
USER DAEMON 312
OTHER APPLICATIONS 316
OPERATING SYSTEM 314
DATA 308
BUFFER MEMORY 322
EVENT PACKET 324
BLOCK STORAGE 328
EVENT BLOCK 326

Fig. 3

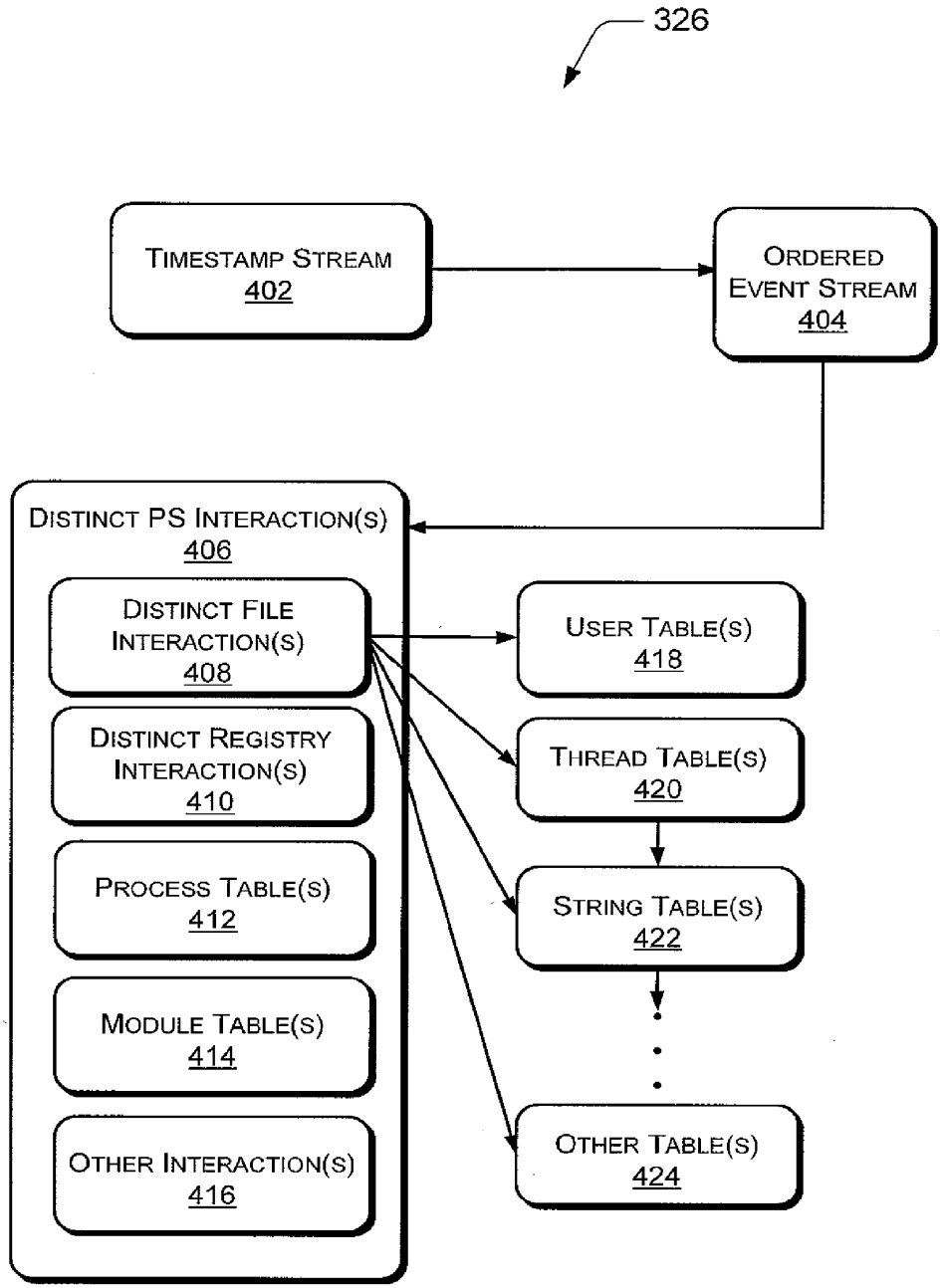

326
TIMESTAMP STREAM
402
ORDERED
EVENT STREAM
404
DISTINCT PS INTERACTION(S)
406
DISTINCT FILE
INTERACTION(S)
408
DISTINCT REGISTRY
INTERACTION(S)
410
PROCESS TABLE(S)
412
MODULE TABLE(S)
414
OTHER INTERACTION(S)
416
USER TABLE(S)
418
THREAD TABLE(S)
420
STRING TABLE(S)
422
OTHER TABLE(S)
424

Fig. 4

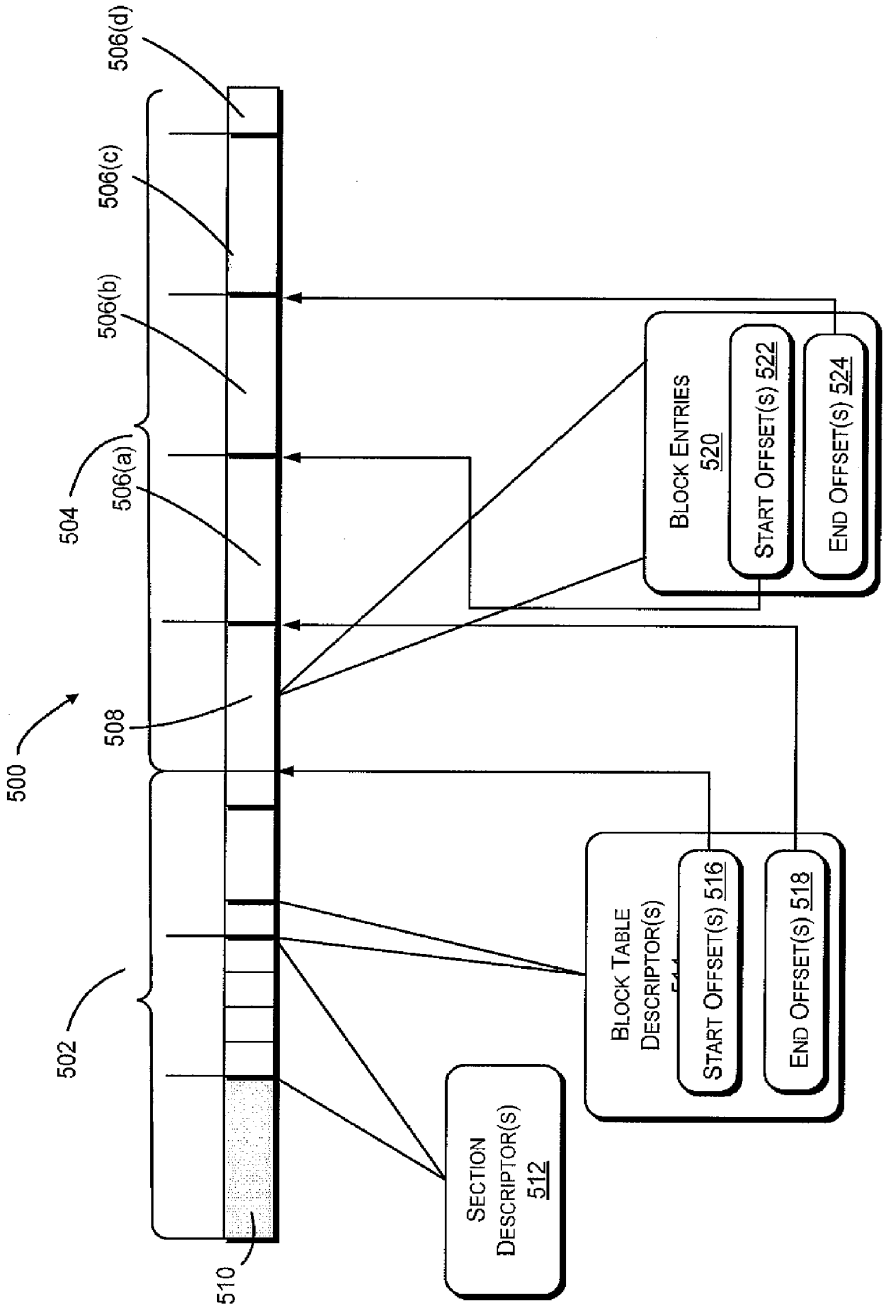

500
502
504
506(a)
506(b)
506(c)
506(d)
508
510
Block Entries 520
Start Offset(s) 522
End Offset(s) 524
Block Table Descriptor(s)
Start Offset(s) 516
End Offset(s) 518
Section Descriptor(s) 512

Fig. 5

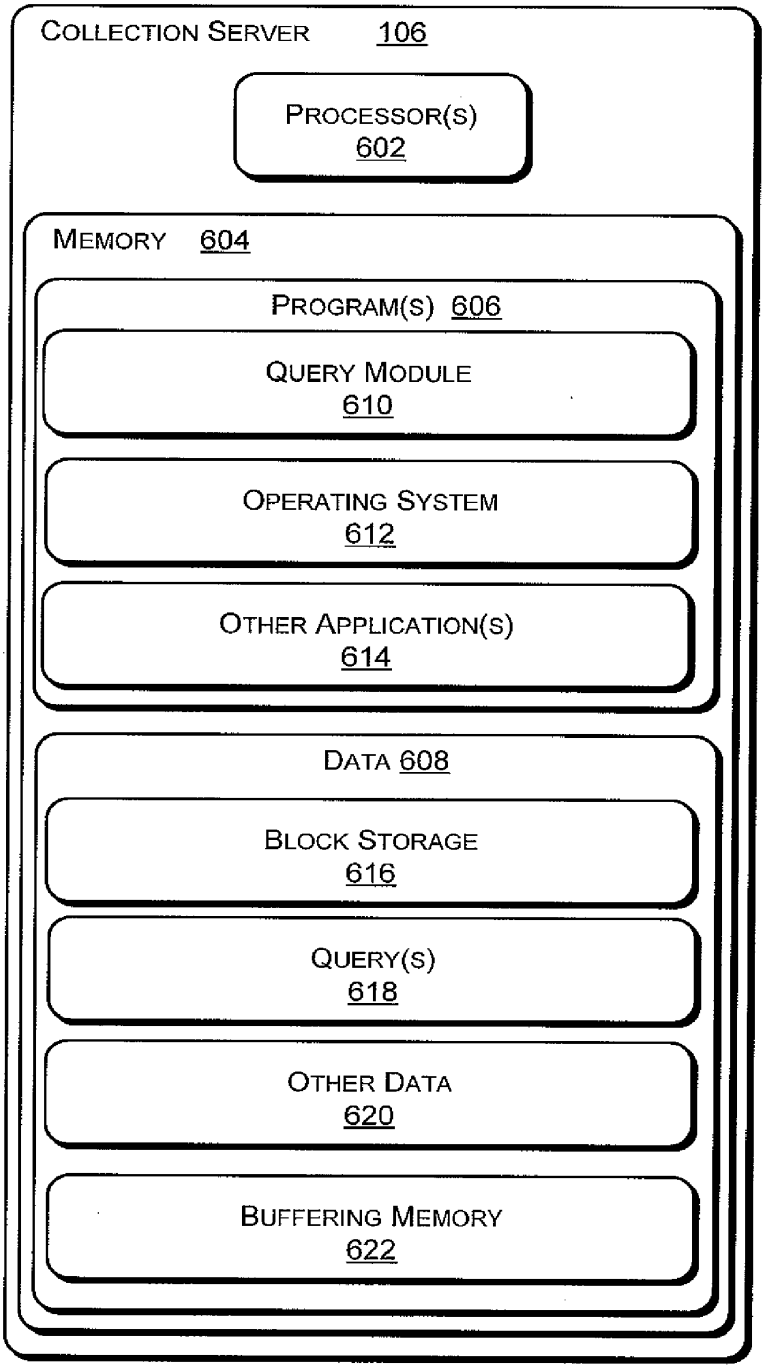

COLLECTION SERVER 106
PROCESSOR(S) 602
MEMORY 604
PROGRAM(S) 606
QUERY MODULE 610
OPERATING SYSTEM 612
OTHER APPLICATION(S) 614
DATA 608
BLOCK STORAGE 616
QUERY(S) 618
OTHER DATA 620
BUFFERING MEMORY 622

Fig. 6

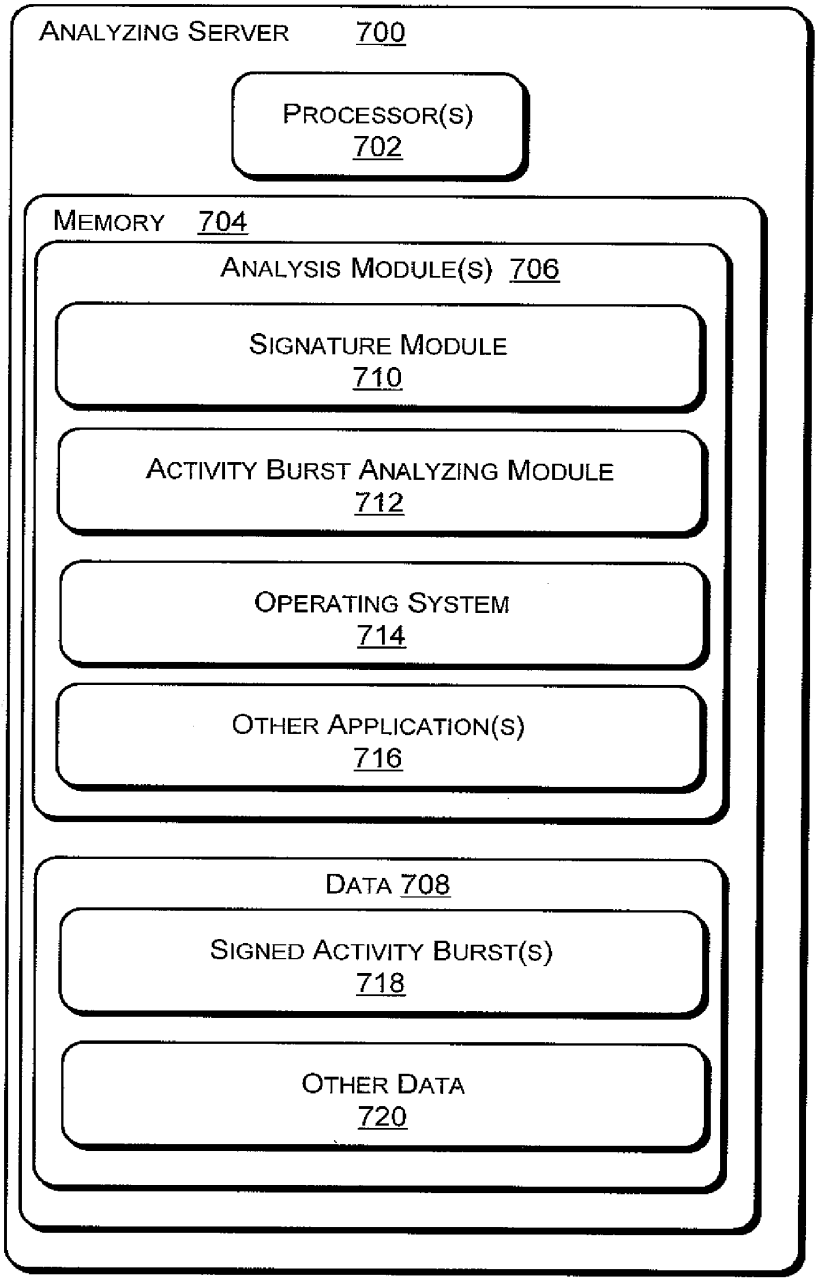

ANALYZING SERVER 700
PROCESSOR(S) 702
MEMORY 704
ANALYSIS MODULE(S) 706
SIGNATURE MODULE 710
ACTIVITY BURST ANALYZING MODULE 712
OPERATING SYSTEM 714
OTHER APPLICATION(S) 716
DATA 708
SIGNED ACTIVITY BURST(S) 718
OTHER DATA 720

Fig. 7

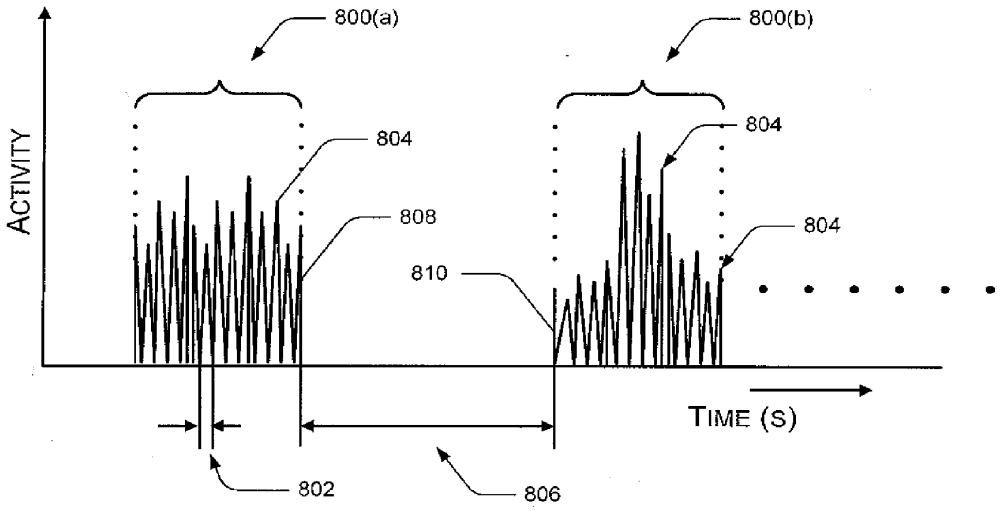


Fig. 8

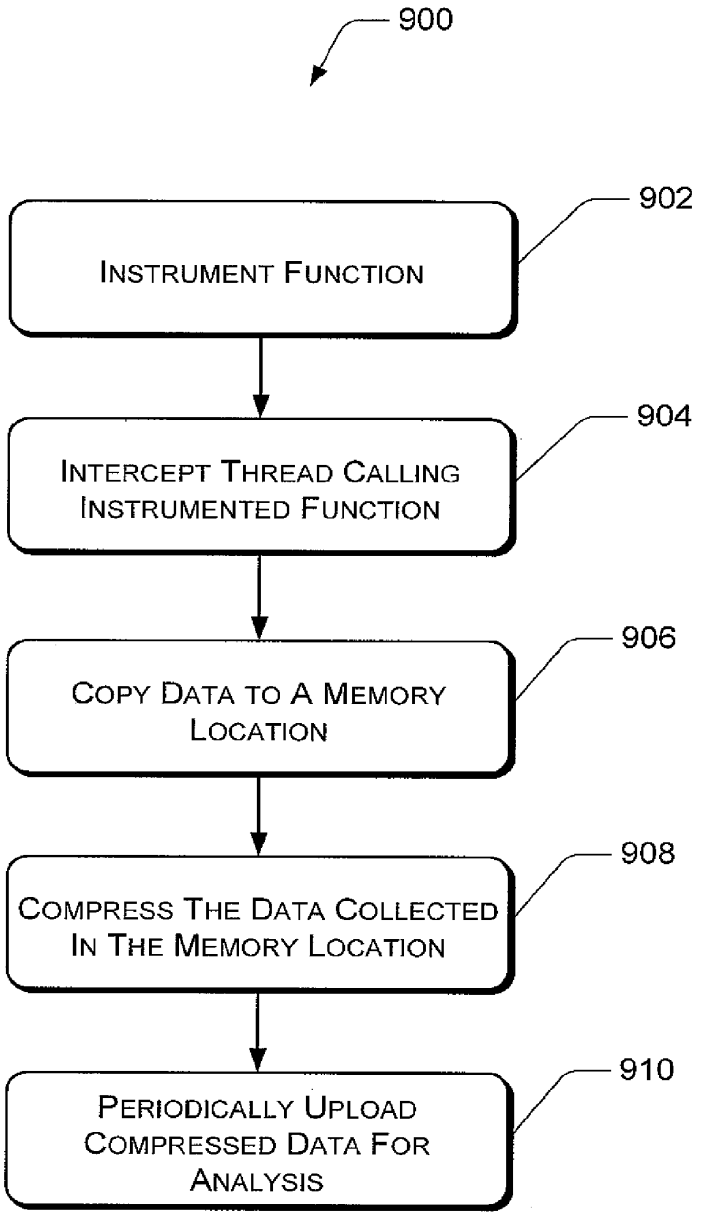

900
902
INSTRUMENT FUNCTION
904
INTERCEPT THREAD CALLING INSTRUMENTED FUNCTION
906
COPY DATA TO A MEMORY LOCATION
908
COMPRESS THE DATA COLLECTED IN THE MEMORY LOCATION
910
PERIODICALLY UPLOAD COMPRESSED DATA FOR ANALYSIS

Fig. 9

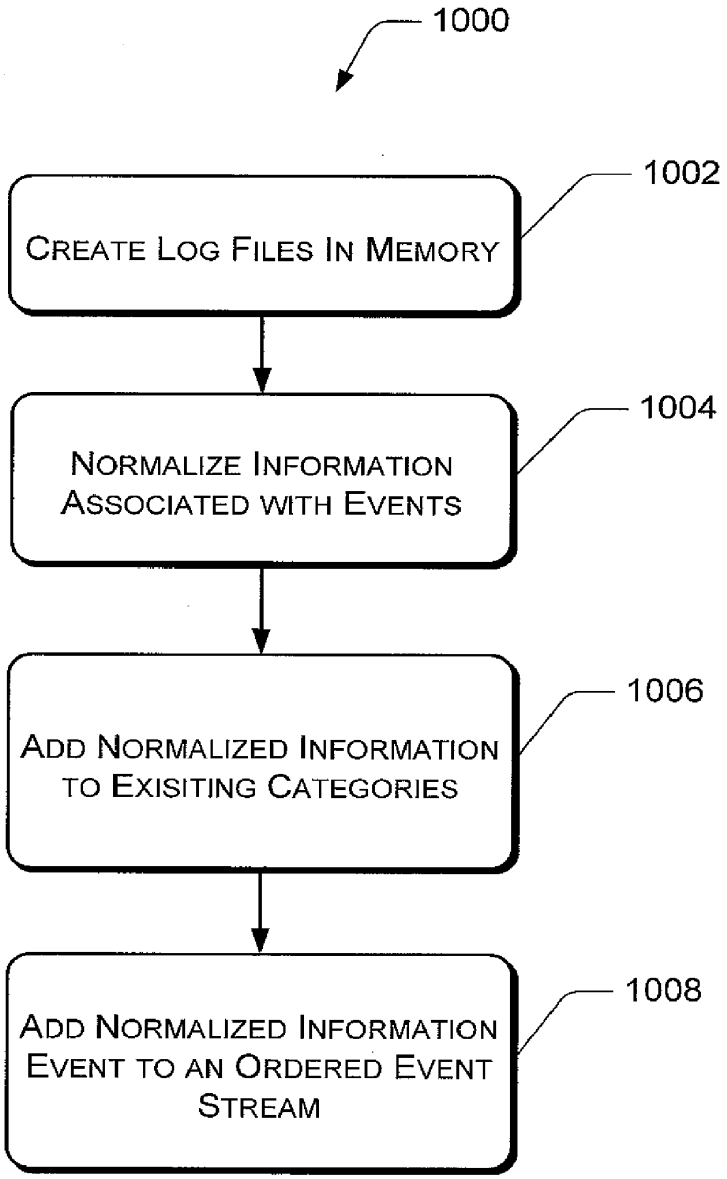

1000
1002
CREATE LOG FILES IN MEMORY
1004
NORMALIZE INFORMATION ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS
1006
ADD NORMALIZED INFORMATION TO EXISITING CATEGORIES
1008
ADD NORMALIZED INFORMATION EVENT TO AN ORDERED EVENT STREAM

Fig. 10

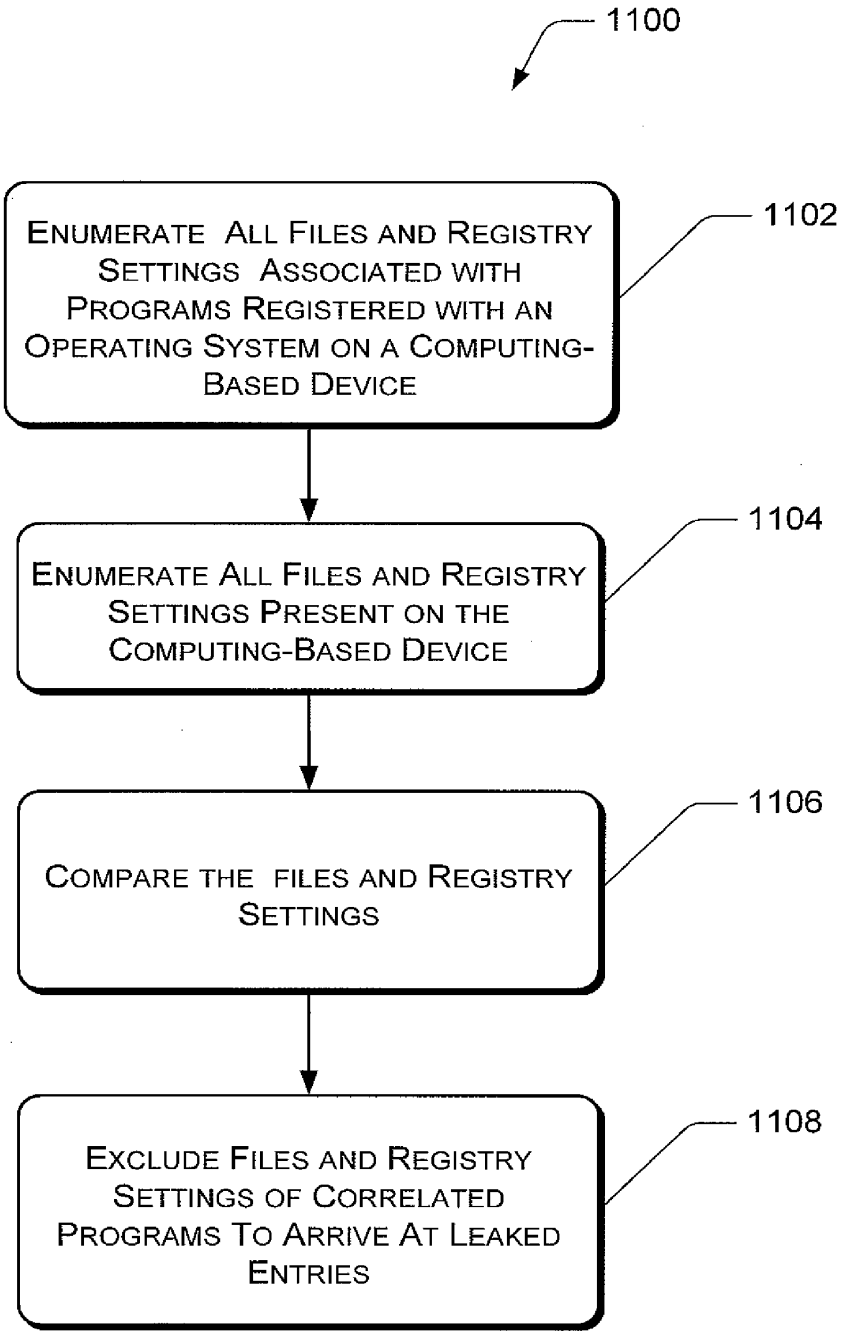

1100
ENUMERATE ALL FILES AND REGISTRY SETTINGS ASSOCIATED WITH PROGRAMS REGISTERED WITH AN OPERATING SYSTEM ON A COMPUTING-BASED DEVICE
1102
ENUMERATE ALL FILES AND REGISTRY SETTINGS PRESENT ON THE COMPUTING-BASED DEVICE
1104
COMPARE THE FILES AND REGISTRY SETTINGS
1106
EXCLUDE FILES AND REGISTRY SETTINGS OF CORRELATED PROGRAMS TO ARRIVE AT LEAKED ENTRIES
1108

Fig. 11

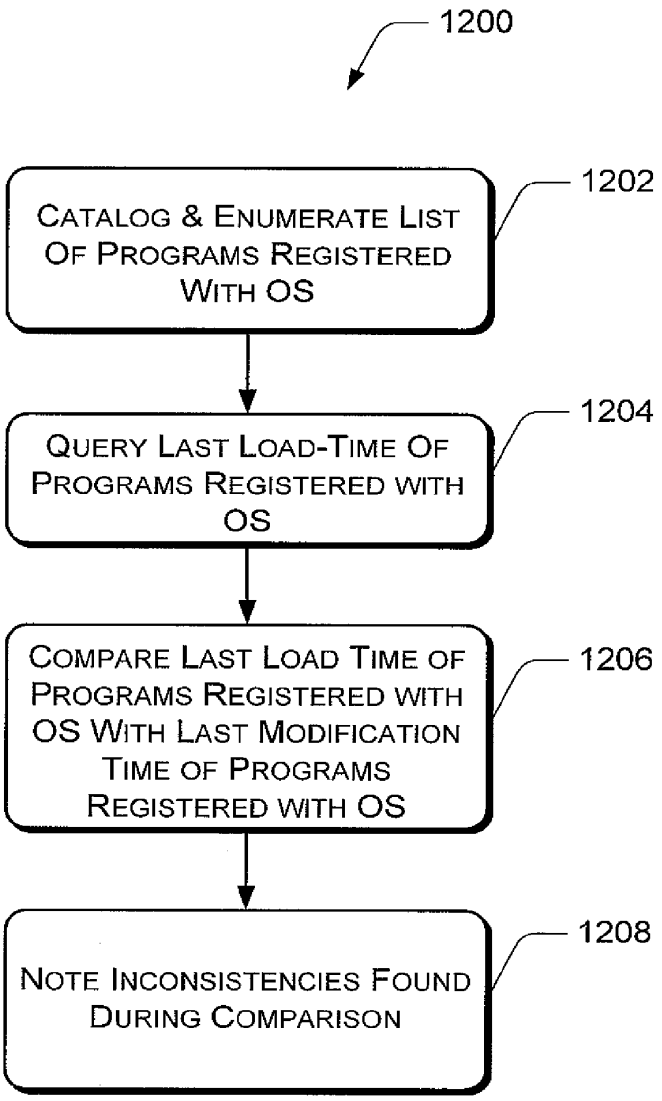

1200
Catalog & Enumerate List Of Programs Registered With OS
1202
Query Last Load-Time Of Programs Registered with OS
1204
Compare Last Load Time of Programs Registered with OS With Last Modification Time of Programs Registered with OS
1206
Note Inconsistencies Found During Comparison
1208

Fig. 12

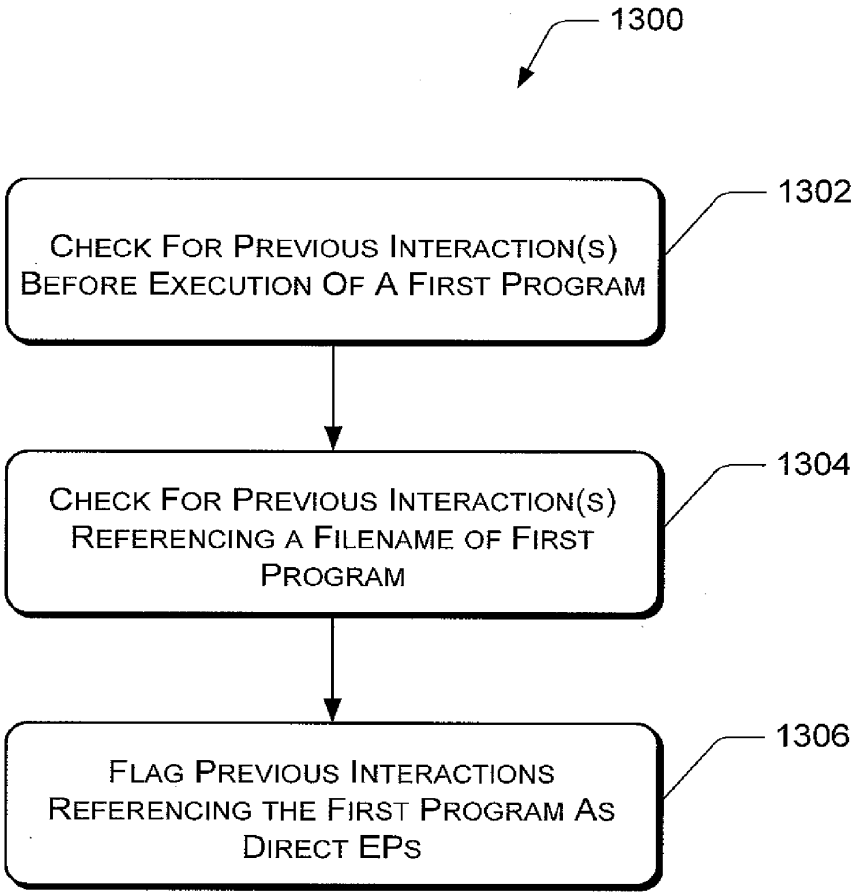

1300
1302
CHECK FOR PREVIOUS INTERACTION(S) BEFORE EXECUTION OF A FIRST PROGRAM
1304
CHECK FOR PREVIOUS INTERACTION(S) REFERENCING A FILENAME OF FIRST PROGRAM
1306
FLAG PREVIOUS INTERACTIONS REFERENCING THE FIRST PROGRAM AS DIRECT EPS

Fig. 13

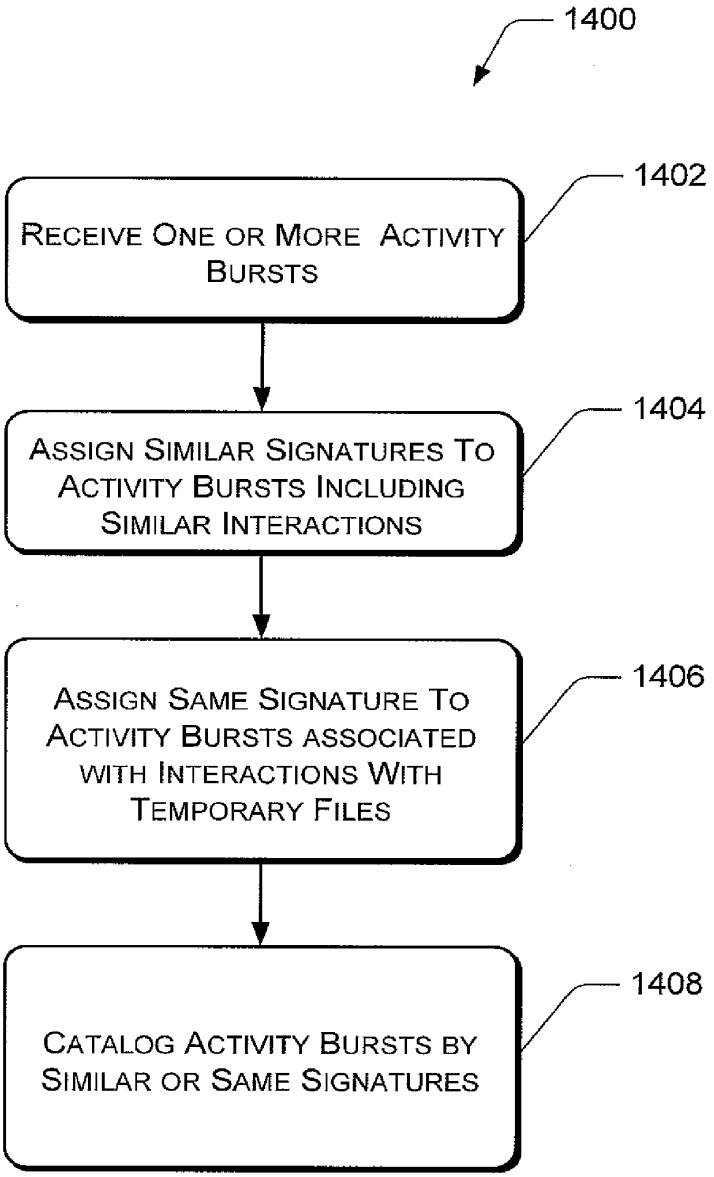

1400
1402
RECEIVE ONE OR MORE ACTIVITY BURSTS
1404
ASSIGN SIMILAR SIGNATURES TO ACTIVITY BURSTS INCLUDING SIMILAR INTERACTIONS
1406
ASSIGN SAME SIGNATURE TO ACTIVITY BURSTS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERACTIONS WITH TEMPORARY FILES
1408
CATALOG ACTIVITY BURSTS BY SIMILAR OR SAME SIGNATURES

Fig. 14

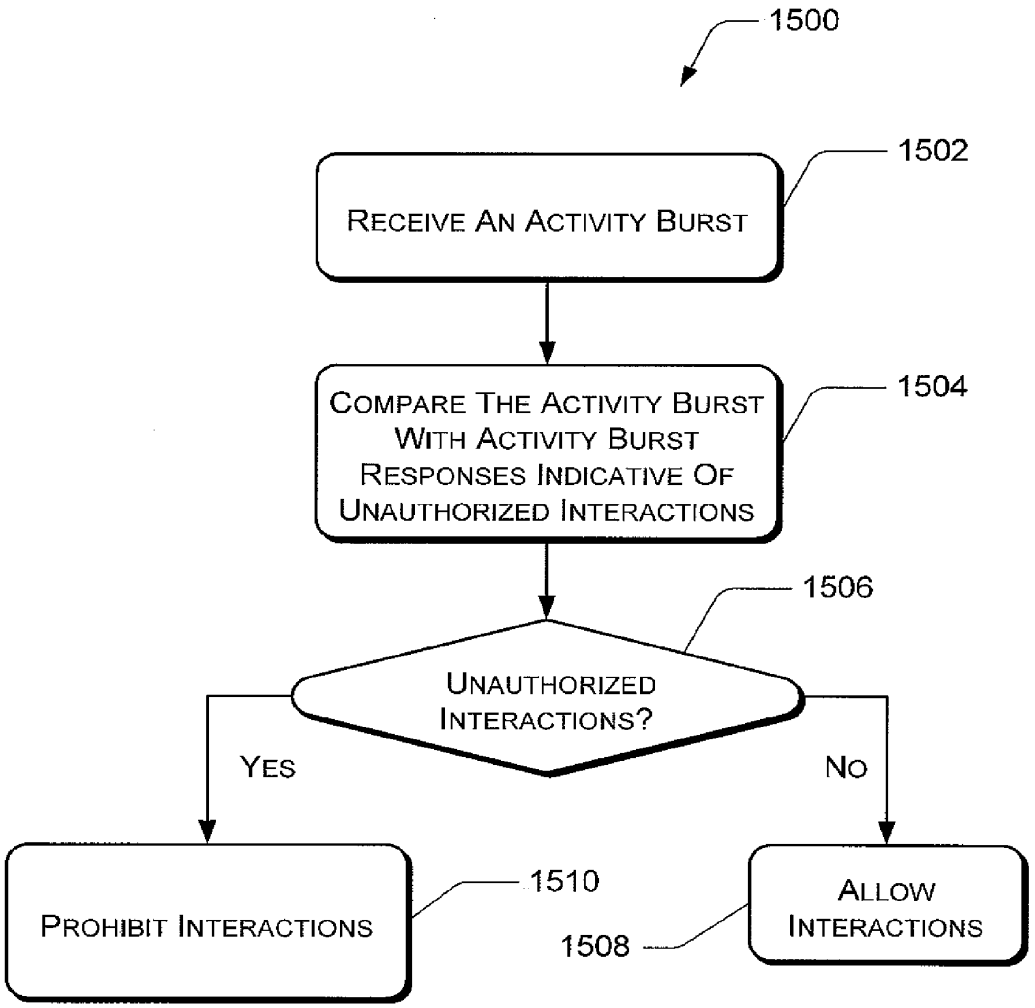

1500
1502
RECEIVE AN ACTIVITY BURST
1504
COMPARE THE ACTIVITY BURST WITH ACTIVITY BURST RESPONSES INDICATIVE OF UNAUTHORIZED INTERACTIONS
1506
UNAUTHORIZED INTERACTIONS?
YES
NO
1510
PROHIBIT INTERACTIONS
1508
ALLOW INTERACTIONS

Fig. 15

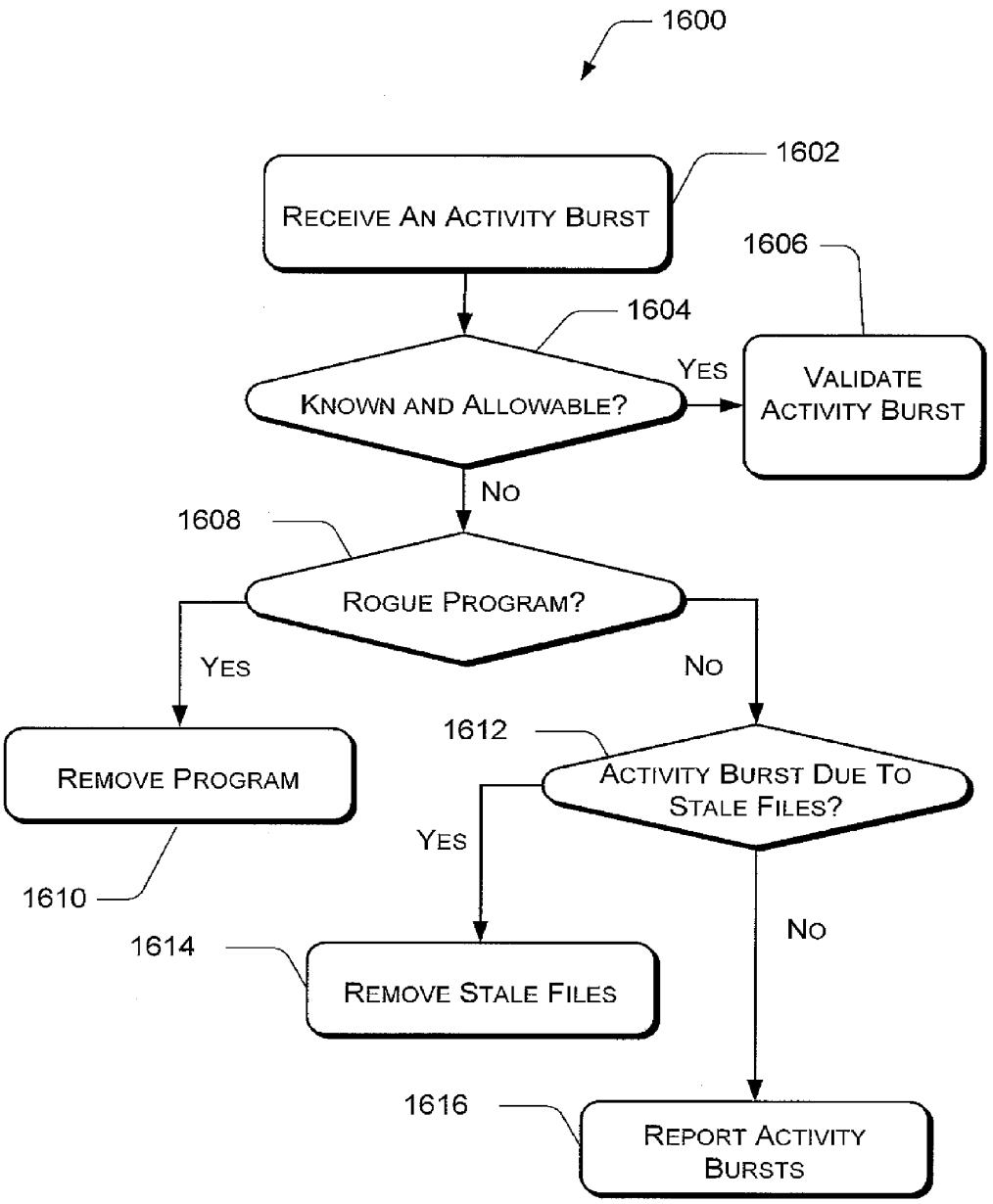

1600
1602
RECEIVE AN ACTIVITY BURST
1606
1604
KNOWN AND ALLOWABLE?
YES
VALIDATE ACTIVITY BURST
NO
1608
ROGUE PROGRAM?
YES
NO
1612
REMOVE PROGRAM
ACTIVITY BURST DUE TO STALE FILES?
YES
1610
NO
1614
REMOVE STALE FILES
1616
REPORT ACTIVITY BURSTS

Fig. 16

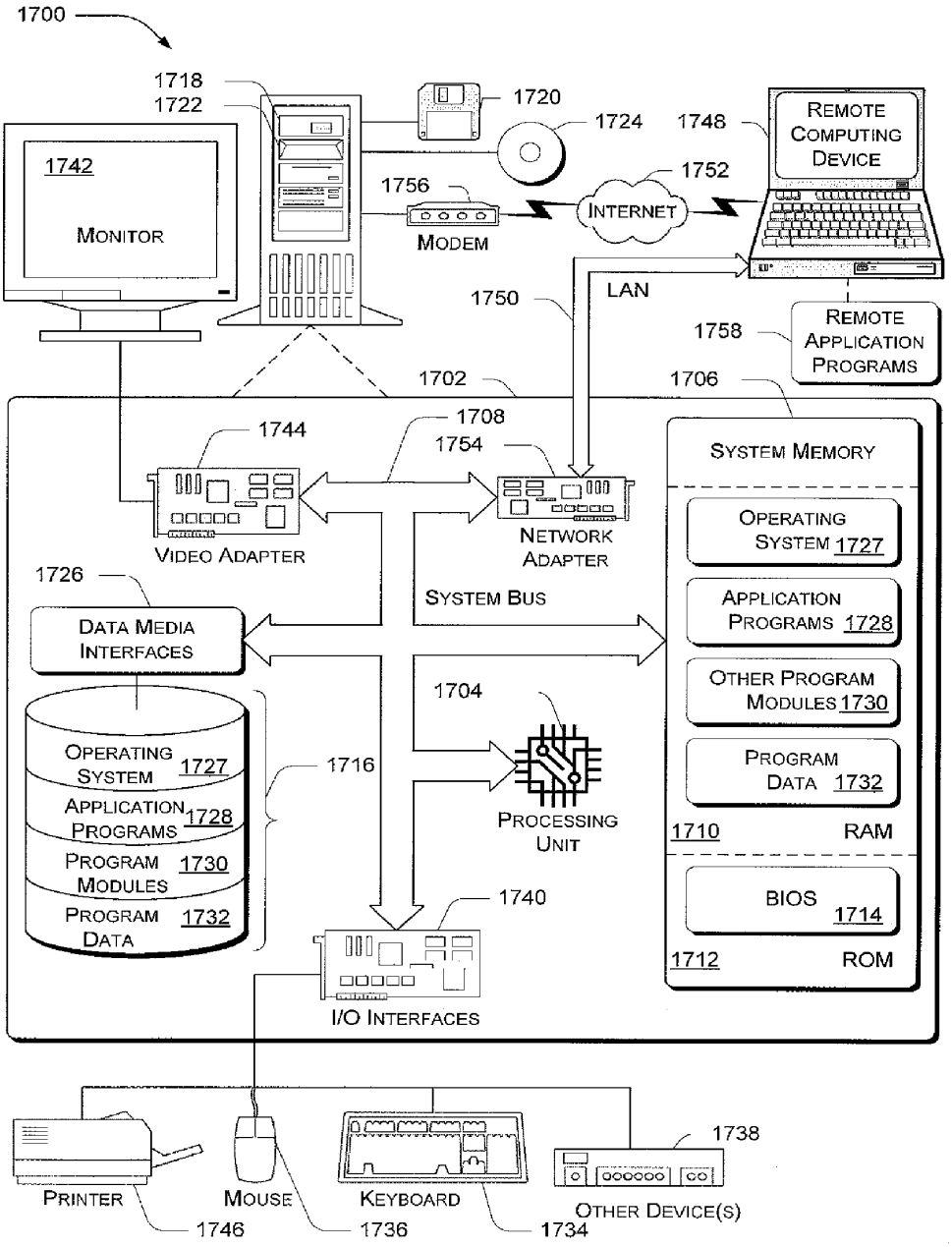

1700
1718
1722
1720
1724
1748
REMOTE COMPUTING DEVICE
1742
MONITOR
1756
MODEM
1752
INTERNET
1750
LAN
1758
REMOTE APPLICATION PROGRAMS
1702
1706
1744
1708
1754
VIDEO ADAPTER
NETWORK ADAPTER
SYSTEM MEMORY
OPERATING SYSTEM 1727
APPLICATION PROGRAMS 1728
OTHER PROGRAM MODULES 1730
PROGRAM DATA 1732
1710
RAM
BIOS 1714
1712
ROM
1726
DATA MEDIA INTERFACES
SYSTEM BUS
1704
PROCESSING UNIT
1716
OPERATING SYSTEM 1727
APPLICATION PROGRAMS 1728
PROGRAM MODULES 1730
PROGRAM DATA 1732
1740
I/O INTERFACES
PRINTER
MOUSE
KEYBOARD
1738
OTHER DEVICE(S)
1746
1736
1734

Fig. 17

THREAD INTERCEPTION AND ANALYSIS

RELATED PATENT APPLICATIONS

[0001] This U.S. patent application claims the benefit of priority from, and hereby incorporates by reference the entire disclosure of, co-pending U.S. Provisional Application for Letters Patent Ser. No. 60/743,382 filed Feb. 28, 2006, and titled "Software Activity Systems Management".

[0002] This U.S. patent application further claims the benefit of priority from, and hereby incorporates by reference the entire disclosure of, co-pending U.S. Provisional Application for Letters Patent Ser. No. 60/807,564 filed Jul. 17, 2006, and titled "Always-On Tracing and Scalable Analysis of Persistent State Interactions".

BACKGROUND

[0003] A primary challenge to building a reliable and secure computer system is managing a persistent state (PS) of the system, which includes all the executable files, configuration settings, and other data that govern how the system functions. Misconfigurations and other PS problems are among the primary causes of failures and security vulnerabilities across a variety of systems ranging from individual desktop machines to large-scale Internet services. PS problems, along with problems caused by failures in system elements such as hardware components and programming logic, can deleteriously affect the entire system.

[0004] The cost of not effectively managing a system's PS is high. For example, PS problems can reproduce themselves after a system reboot or an application restart. In such a scenario, if known problem identification fails, and if a subsequent system reboot/application restart fails to remedy the PS problem, there may be no choice but to manually examine the system to identify a root cause item in the PS.

[0005] Manual investigation of a system to identify a root cause item in the PS is difficult and expensive due to the large number of potential problems. For example, a potential set of items that can impact an application having trouble is huge, and correspondingly a potential root cause list can include a complete set of items on the system.

SUMMARY

[0006] This summary is provided to introduce simplified concepts relating to thread interception and analysis which are further described below in the detailed description. This summary is not intended to identify essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended for use in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter.

[0007] Apparatus and methods for intercepting and analyzing threads are disclosed. In one embodiment, a thread data recorder is configured to instrument one or more existing functions by modifying computer executable instructions in the functions to intercept threads calling the functions. In one possible implementation, the number of existing functions instrumented can be reduced by instrumenting choke point functions.

[0008] The instrumented functions can also capture data associated with the threads as the threads execute at the function. This data can be saved to memory and compressed into logs. In one aspect, the data can be saved and/or compressed at a time when processor resources are being used at or below a predetermined level. The captured data can be used to analyze a functioning of a computer system in which the threads were used.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] The detailed description is described with reference to the accompanying figures. In the figures, the leftmost digit(s) of a reference number identifies the figure in which the reference number first appears. The same numbers are used throughout the drawings to reference like features and components.

[0010] FIG. **1** illustrates an exemplary network environment in which one or more threads are generated.

[0011] FIG. **2** illustrates an exemplary architecture for intercepting threads and capturing data associated with the threads.

[0012] FIG. **3** illustrates an exemplary computing-based device for intercepting threads and capturing data associated with the threads.

[0013] FIG. **4** illustrates an exemplary logical representation of an event block.

[0014] FIG. **5** illustrates an exemplary physical representation of an event block collection.

[0015] FIG. **6** illustrates an exemplary collection server.

[0016] FIG. **7** illustrates an exemplary analyzing server.

[0017] FIG. **8** illustrates an exemplary representation of one or more activity bursts.

[0018] FIG. **9** illustrates exemplary method(s) for intercepting threads and capturing data associated with the threads.

[0019] FIG. **10** illustrates exemplary method(s) for adding normalized events to an ordered event stream.

[0020] FIG. **11** illustrates exemplary method(s) for detecting leaked entries.

[0021] FIG. **12** illustrates exemplary method(s) for detecting common misconfigurations.

[0022] FIG. **13** illustrates exemplary method(s) for detecting one or more extensibility points.

[0023] FIG. **14** illustrates exemplary method(s) for analyzing one or more activity bursts.

[0024] FIG. **15** illustrates exemplary method(s) for prohibiting the execution of unauthorized interactions.

[0025] FIG. **16** illustrates exemplary method(s) for detecting rogue programs.

[0026] FIG. **17** illustrates an exemplary computer environment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0027] Thread interception and analysis is described in which embodiments provide for the analysis of a functioning of a computer system through collection of data from program execution threads. Program execution threats can include any thread in a system that executes code from a given program.

[0028] A thread can include a path of execution on a processor, and threads can be associated with hardware, paths of execution in hypervisors from a virtual machine (VM) implementation, single threaded systems (such as legacy Unix Oss systems), multithreaded OS, and so on. In one exemplary implementation, a program thread, or a thread owned by an OS itself may execute code from another program. Collection and/or tracking of a thread may be conducted regardless of the owner or creator or the thread.

[0029] In one implementation, select functions in one or more operational layers of a system are instrumented to include computer readable instructions which instigate interception of threads calling the select functions. The computer readable instructions can also instigate collection of data associated with the threads calling the functions. This data can include details of processes/programs associated with the threads, users associated with the threads, timestamps associated with the threads, interactions associated with the threads, the state of the overall system, and so on.

[0030] The data can be used for several purposes. For example, data associated with the threads can be examined to verify that interactions being instigated by the threads are legal according to a set policy. In another implementation, the data collected can be compressed, stored, and later analyzed to isolate possible causes of errant behavior or malfunctions in the computer system.

[0031] In another possible embodiment, the collected data can be analyzed by grouping a collection of related interactions into an activity burst and comparing activity bursts associated with similar attributes. In one implementation, activity bursts associated with similar interactions can be compared with activity bursts associated with the collected data. In yet another implementation, activity bursts associated with the collected data can also be compared with interactions that are specific to one or more users. Similarly, in another possible implementation a signature can be assigned to activity bursts associated with unwarranted interactions, enabling a computer system to quickly recognize and prohibit such interactions. Moreover, activity bursts can be used to identify clusters of related activity along any dimensions, including time, users, programs, and so on.

[0032] While aspects of described systems and methods for thread interception and analysis can be implemented in any number of different computing systems, environments, and/or configurations, embodiments of thread interception and analysis are described in the context of the following exemplary system architecture(s).

An Exemplary System

[0033] FIG. **1** illustrates an exemplary computer system **100** in which threads can be intercepted and analyzed. Computer system **100** includes a central computing-based device **102**, other computing-based devices **104**(*a*)-(*n*), and a collection server **106**. Central computing-based device **102**, computing-based devices **104**(*a*)-(*n*), and collection server **106** can include personal computers (PCs), web servers, email servers, home entertainment devices, game consoles, set top boxes, and any other computing-based device known in the art.

[0034] Moreover, computer system **100** can include any number of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). For example, in one implementation, computer system **100** can be a company network, including thousands of office PCs, various servers, and other computing-based devices spread throughout several countries. Alternately, in another possible implementation, system **100** can include a home network with a limited number of PCs belonging to a single family.

[0035] Computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) can be coupled to each other in various combinations through a wired and/or wireless network, including a LAN, WAN, or any other networking technology known in the art.

[0036] Computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) can also include thread data recorders **108**(*a*)-(*n*) respectively, capable of instrumenting functions in system **100** to intercept threads. Instrumenting functions can include modifying, adding and/or deleting computer readable instructions in the function to intercept threads calling the function. In one possible implementation, instrumenting functions also includes modifying, adding and/or deleting computer readable instructions in the function to require the thread to execute computer readable instructions in the function that enable the capture of data associated with the thread, including a program with which the thread is associated, one or more interactions associated with the thread, a user of the program with which the thread is associated, a time stamp associated with each interaction in a thread, and so on.

[0037] In still another implementation, thread data recorders **108**(*a*)-(*n*) can also be used to monitor code interpreted by a Virtual Machine (VM). A VM includes programmable functions that interpret code being run on the VM instead of sending the code for execution to one or more processors. Code interpreted by a VM can be monitored by thread data recorders **108**(*a*)-(*n*) to identify functions to be intercepted. At interception time, thread data recorders **108**(*a*)-(*n*) can examine and/or record a state of a system running on the VM. This examination and recording may be equivalent to a binary modification of the code. The binary modification may become part of the VM instead of requiring changes to any running software.

[0038] The instrumented functions can include any functions that might be called by a program/process. In one implementation, the instrumented functions can include low level choke point functions, such as file system drivers, registry functions, functions creating new processes and/or services, etc.

[0039] Data captured from threads can be stored and/or processed to regulate the behavior of system **100**, and to investigate a condition of system **100**. Types of data which can be captured from threads by thread data recorders **108**(*a*)-(*n*), and the operation of thread data recorders **108** (*a*)-(*n*) will be discussed in more detail in conjunction with FIG. **2** below.

[0040] In exemplary computer system **100** each of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) includes a thread data recorder **108**. It will be understood, however, that thread data recorders **108**(*a*)-(*n*) can be included on any combination of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). For example, in one implementation, a single computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in computing system **100** can include a thread data recorder **108**. Alternately, in another possible implementation, several selected computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) can include thread data recorders **108**.

[0041] Data captured from functions can be processed within thread data recorder **108**, or it can be transmitted to another device, such as collection server **106** for retention, processing and/or analysis. The operation of collection server **106** will be discussed in more detail below in conjunction with FIG. **6**. FIG. **1** illustrates that collection server **106** is coupled to computing-based device **102**. It will also be understood, however, that collection server **106** can be coupled to one or more of computing-based devices **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Moreover, other collection servers **106** may exist in computer system **100**, with any combination of computing-based devices **102**, **104** (*a*)-(*n*) being coupled to the one or more collection servers **106**.

[0042] Additionally, it will be understood that computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) may be coupled to one or more collection servers **106** trough other computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). For example, in one exemplary implementation, data received by thread data recorder **108** (*b*) can be transmitted via computing-based device **102**, to collection server **106** where the data may be collected. In a similar manner, data from thread data recorders **108**(*c*)-(*n*) can be transmitted to, and collected at, collection server **106**.

[0043] FIG. **2** illustrates an exemplary architecture **200** of various operational layers in one or more of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). The operational layers need not be directly related to the functionality of a program being executed by one or more of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Rather, the operational layers serve only as an illustration to indicate various stages that are involved in thread interception. The layers in consideration can be separate logical or physical platforms implemented through software or physical hardware.

[0044] Architecture **200** includes a program layer **202**, a middleware layer **204** and an operating system layer **206**. In the exemplary implementation of architecture **200** shown, thread data recorder **108** operates within operating system layer **206**. It will also be understood, however, that thread data recorder **108** can exist in other layers in architecture **200**. For example, thread data recorder **108** can exist in one or more of layers **202**, **204**, **206** at different times. Additionally, thread data recorder **108** can exist in one or more of layers **202**, **204**, **206** simultaneously. In this way interception of threads can be done at any layer **202**, **204**, **206**. In yet another implementation, operating system layer **206** can also run in a Virtual Machine (VM) allowing the capture of data in an operational layer associated with the VM. In such a scenario, this operational layer associated with the VM may be in addition to layers **202**, **204** and **206**.

[0045] In one exemplary implementation, thread data recorder **108** captures data associated with interactions between one or more programs (such as an application, an operating system, and so on) and a file system **208** by intercepting threads from the one or more programs. File system **208** can include, for example, files such as data files, executable files and settings information (such as configuration settings), and so on.

[0046] As discussed above in conjunction with FIG. **1**, each of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) can include thread data recorder **108**. Alternately, thread data recorders **108** can be included on any combination of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0047] Program layer **202** can include one or more programs, such as applications, running in architecture **200**. Program layer **202** provides a platform for the one or more programs to interact between themselves and also perform common application services associated with application processes. Some possible examples of applications that may run on program layer **202** include word processing applications, spreadsheet applications, mail applications, etc.

[0048] The one or more programs running on program layer **202** can interact with data and/or settings in file system **208** during the execution of one or more operations. Possible examples of operations or interactions include read, write and execute operations performed on file system **208** including changes in files and registry settings in file system **208**.

[0049] Interactions between program layer **202**, middleware layer **204**, operating system **206** and file system **208** occur through threads generated by programs running within program layer **202**. Every program, performing one or more tasks, has at least one thread that is generated as a result of its execution, such as a thread associated with a program's MAIN function. Threads allow a program to split itself into two or more simultaneously running tasks. These tasks, for example, can be associated with the execution of a program generating the thread. Alternately, the tasks can be associated with communication between the program and other applications in which an interaction with file system **208** results (such as when a configuration setting is changed).

[0050] It will be understood that information associated with any threads in a system, such as system **100**, can be captured. For example, information associated with the execution of threads generated at any of the operational layers can be intercepted and collected for future analysis. This can include, for example, threads associated with an operating system calling into code for a program.

[0051] Individual threads can be indicative of individual interactions between the one or more programs and file system **208**. Each thread carries with it data defining attributes that are unique to that interaction. For example, attributes can include an identity of a program initiating the interaction, a stack of nested functions in a current functional sequence, and so on. For each interaction with file system **208**, the thread generated in program layer **202** is transmitted through middleware layer **204** to operating system layer **206**.

[0052] Middleware layer **204** includes computer software called middleware, which connects software components and/or programs running in program layer **202** to operating system layer **206**. Middleware layer **204** provides an intervening operational layer between program layer **202** and operating system layer **206**, and middleware can support complex, distributed applications. Some possible examples of middleware include web servers, application servers, content management systems, and similar tools supporting application development, delivery and so on.

[0053] Operating system layer **206** acts as an interface between a program and data and/or settings in file system **208**. Operating system layer **206** can also oversee any interactions with the data and/or settings in file system **208**. Moreover, operating system layer **206** can provide a runtime environment for the execution of one or more programs running in program layer **202**.

[0054] As noted above, operating system layer **206** also can include thread data recorder **108**. Thread data recorder **108** is configured to effect the interception of threads associated with interactions between one or more programs running on program layer **202** and file system **208**. Thread data recorder **108** can also be configured to affect the capture of information associated with the threads.

[0055] For example, in one implementation, upon initialization of system **100**, thread data recorder **108** instruments select functions running on system **100** to intercept threads calling the functions. The functions can also be instrumented to capture data associated with the threads, including: an identity of a program in program layer **202** with which each thread is associated, interactions associated with each thread, a user of a program with which each thread is associated, a time stamp associated with each interaction in a thread, and so on. In one possible implementation, data captured by thread data recorder **108** in operating system layer **206**, is in a programmable language that is native to

operating system layer **206**. In yet another implementation, information associated with the execution of threads generated at any of the operational layers can be intercepted and collected for future analysis. In another possible implementation, thread data recorder **108** can also capture data associated with the execution of program code on a VM.

[0056] Thread data recorder **108** can also instrument functions running in any layer **202**, **204**, **206** to intercept threads calling the functions and capture data from the threads. For example, to trace persistent state (PS) interactions, functions in the lowest layer involved in retrieving and setting PS can be instrumented. In FIG. **3**, the lowest layer is illustrated as operating system layer **206**. It is also possible, however, for the lowest layer to include layers such as a virtual machine layer, which could be implemented in hardware, software, firmware, etc.

[0057] Intercepting threads calling functions at the lowest level or layer enables coverage of all program threads running in system **100**. Moreover, functions to be instrumented in the lowest layer can be chosen from among choke point functions which are routinely relied on by other functions,—such as file system functions, registry functions, functions creating new processes or services, and so on. In this way, the number of functions which must be instrumented can be reduced.

[0058] Alternately, functions in higher layers **204**, **202** can be instrumented by thread data recorder **108**. For example, if it is desired to track which web browsers are visiting which web sites, functions in higher levels called by the threads can be instrumented. For instance, by instrumenting functions in program layer **202**, data including a URL and a window requested by a web browser can be captured from a thread associated with the web browser.

[0059] In contrast, at lower layers, such as operating system layer **206**, there is less context available than at higher layers, such as layers **202**, **204**. As a result it may be more difficult to reconstruct logical high level interactions, such as user intentions by intercepting threads from lower layers.

[0060] For example, threads intercepted at lower layers—such as IP packets being sent or received by a device such as a computer—may not provide enough information to deduce that a web browser is opening a URL. This results because the context that these packets are all related to an HTTP stream of data for a web browser may not be available. Without such contextual information, it may be difficult to establish a relationship between actions of a system—such as the sending of specific IP packets to a destination at a given time—with a user of a web browser.

[0061] FIG. **3** illustrates an exemplary architecture **300** of at least one of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Architecture **300** includes one or more processor(s) **302** and a memory **304**. Processor(s) **302** include, for example, microprocessors, microcomputers, microcontrollers, digital signal processors, central processing units, state machines, logic circuitries, and/or any devices that manipulate signals based on operational instructions. Among other capabilities, processor(s) **302** are configured to fetch and execute computer-readable instructions stored in memory **304**.

[0062] Memory **304** can include any computer-readable medium known in the art including, for example, volatile memory (e.g., RAM) and/or non-volatile memory (e.g., flash, etc.). As illustrated in FIG. **3**, memory **304** also can include program(s) **306** and data **308**. Program(s) **306** include, for example, thread data recorder **108**, a compressing module **310**, a user daemon **312**, an operating system **314**, and other application(s) **316** such as word processor applications, spreadsheet applications, and so on.

[0063] As discussed above in conjunction with FIG. **2**, thread data recorder **108** instruments selected functions and captures data from intercepted threads calling the instrumented functions in one or more operational layers **202**, **204**, **206**. The captured data can be used to analyze a functioning of a computer system of which computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) are a part. In another possible implementation, thread data recorder **108** can also capture data associated with the execution of a program code on a VM.

[0064] Thread data recorder **108** includes a duplicating module **318** and a directing module **320**. In one implementation, thread data recorder **108** instruments an existing function by hooking into the function. In one exemplary aspect, duplicating module **318** is hooked into the existing function. Duplicating model **318** can include computer readable instructions which are executed by a calling thread as the thread executes at the function. The computer readable instructions associated with duplicating module **318** can also copy data to a shared memory as an event.

[0065] For example, once a thread calls an instrumented function and the thread is intercepted by the instrumented function, data associated with the thread can be captured and duplicated by duplicating module **318**. Data associated with the thread can include data characterizing an interaction between the thread and the function, or data associated with an action which generated the thread. For instance, the data can characterize an interaction associated with the thread, a state of system **100** at the time the function is called, etc. The data can also be information related to a file, string, memory location, filename associated with a file, user ID, thread ID, interaction type, program generating the thread, time of execution of an interaction, time of completion of an interaction, and so on.

[0066] Thread data recorder **108** can store the captured and/or duplicated data in a buffer memory **322** as event packets **324**. Buffer memory **322** can include any computer-readable medium known in the art including, for example, volatile memory (e.g., RAM) or non-volatile memory (e.g., flash and other types of memory known in the art) or a combination thereof. Though shown as residing in data **308**, it will also be understood that buffer memory **322** can reside outside of data **308**, such as in memory **304**. Additionally, in one implementation, buffer memory **322** can be located externally from computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0067] In one possible implementation, copied data lacking attributes providing identification, such as a filename, can be associated with a unique identifier by thread data recorder **108**. Such unique identifiers can include, for example, handles. For instance, events lacking attributes providing for identification of the events can be fixed up by identifying other events with the same handle from the same thread, and then copying a name associated with the handle to the event missing the attributes.

[0068] Directing module **320** in thread data recorder **108** directs user daemon **312** to implement compression of event packets **324** collected in buffer memory **322**. To this end, user daemon **312** directs compressing module **310** to compress event packets **324** into an event block **326** which can be stored in block storage **328**. Block storage **328** can include one or more event blocks **326**.

[0069] User daemon **312** is a process that is neither started nor ended through direct intervention of a user. In one implementation, user daemon **312** is a service. In another implementation, user daemon **312** can be included within the programmable instructions of a Virtual Machine (VM) and its associated operational layer. In yet another implementation user daemon **312** can be implemented in the kernel of an operating system, such as operating system **314**.

[0070] User daemon **312** can be programmed to implement compression of event packets **324** after a certain memory capacity of buffer memory **322** has been reached. In another implementation, user daemon **312** can be programmed to periodically implement compression of event packets **324**. In yet another possible implementation, user daemon **312** can implement compression of event packets **324** in buffer memory **322** into one or more event blocks **326** of a predetermined size.

[0071] In yet another possible implementation, user daemon **312** can periodically implement the transmission of event blocks **326** to collection server **106**. In still another possible implementation, user daemon **312** may be located externally from computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). For example, the externally placed user daemon **312** can be included within programmable instructions of a Virtual Machine (VM) and its associated operational layer.

[0072] User daemon **312** may also, for example, manage its own operation as per inputs provided by either or all of thread data recorder **108**, collection server **106**, etc. Additionally, user daemon **312** can be configured to perform any or all of its functions at moments when processing resources are not being used by other programs, or when processing resources are being used at or below a predefined level of activity. Moreover, user daemon **312** can be configured to perform any or all of its functions on one or more specific processors. In one implementation this could include one or more specific processors dedicated to user daemon **312**.

[0073] Thread data recorder **108** can prepare event blocks **326** stored in block storage **328** by grouping event packets **324** into event blocks **326** on the basis of like or similar attributes in event packets **324**. For example, event blocks **326** can be formed which include all event packets **324** in buffer memory **322** associated with a particular word processing program. Alternately, in another possible implementation, event blocks **326** can be formed, which include all event packets **324** in buffer memory **322** associated with a particular user ID.

[0074] Event blocks **326** are discrete units including information associated with threads intercepted at instrumented functions. This information associated with threads can include information related to the functioning of system **100**.

[0075] In one possible implementation, information associated with threads is organized in block storage **328** to implement a searchable collection of the information. A searchable collection of such information—such as an organized collection of event blocks **326**—can be called a log. The structure of event blocks **326** and block storage **328** will be explained in greater detail in conjunction with FIGS. **4** and **5** below.

[0076] Additionally, though FIG. **3** illustrates thread data recorder **108** as including duplicating module **318**, and directing module **320**, it is also possible for thread data recorder **318** to include other programs and elements, such as compressing module **310**, and user daemon **312**. Moreover, thread data recorder **108** may reside within other programs in programs **306**. For example, in one possible implementation, thread data recorder **108** may be a part of operating system **314**.

[0077] In FIG. **4** an exemplary logical representation of an event block **326** stored in block storage **328** is illustrated. The format of event blocks **326** may be guided by many considerations. For example, in one exemplary implementation, threads may be represented as traces of events. Traces of events include event information represented in two or more parallel, but connected, streams of data.

[0078] In the exemplary logical representation given in FIG. **4**, event information in event blocks **326** is represented by a timestamp stream **402** and an ordered event stream **404**. Timestamp stream **402** can include information relating to groups of interactions times at which events under consideration took place, and so on. For example, information included in timestamp stream **402** can include, for example, a time when threads associated with the event information in block **326** were generated, start and end times when the event associated with the event information in block **326** took place, and so on.

[0079] In one implementation, times at which events under consideration took place are represented as a table of event IDs, where each event ID is an identifier for the distinct file, registry, module, process events, and so on. These event IDs are arranged in the manner in which they are received. In another implementation, the events can be arranged on the basis of other entities for example, timestamp, offset of a first event with a timestamp, offset of a last event with this timestamp, and so on. The manner in which events are arranged is further discussed in conjunction with FIG. **5**.

[0080] Ordered event stream **404** in event block **326** includes event information intercepted and duplicated by any of thread data recorders **108**. Event information can include information relating to a nature of an interaction, an application which initiated the interaction, and so on.

[0081] Event information in ordered event stream **404** can be normalized into one or more sections of distinct persistent state (PS) interaction(s) **406** such as distinct file interaction (s) **408**, distinct registry interaction(s) **410**, process table(s) **412**, module table(s) **414**, and other interaction(s) **416**. In this way event information in persistent state (PS) interaction(s) **406** can be organized or arranged in sub-divisions on the basis of certain attributes. Each type of interaction **408**-**416** in distinct PS interaction(s) **406** can be mapped to a section in a log file, such as event block **326**, block storage **328** or a combination thereof. Mapping and normalization of event information such as that included in distinct PS interaction(s) **406** can be accomplished using any procedure known in the art.

[0082] Process table(s) **412** can be used to track processes, including a path to an executable that started a process (and perhaps also a hash of the executable), and a start and an end time of the process. In one implementation, process table(s) **412** can include information describing attributes associated with an event in consideration. The information may include, for example, a time of creation, a user context, an image name (stored as a string), a cmdline (stored as a string), a command line affecting the event, various handle information to further describe system context at the time of occurrence of the event, and so on.

[0083] Module table(s) **414** can include information defining one or more settings associated with a program module

resulting in an event in consideration. Such information can include, for example, a file name string stored in a string table, timestamp information, a user context, reference to a read/process responsible for loading the program module, a path to the program module in memory (and/or a hash of the executable), and so on.

[0084] In one implementation, module table(s) **414** are similar to registries or files.

[0085] Distinct file interaction(s) **408** include, for example, information related to one or more interactions that have occurred with file system **208**. Distinct file interaction (s) **408** can include information associated with all logged events that occur in a system. Such interactions may include one or more read and/or write processes to file system **208** from one or more applications running on program layer **202**. Examples of information related to distinct file interaction(s) **408** include path names of files, filenames, whether the interaction is with a file or a directory, numbers of bytes read and/or written, and so on. In yet another implementation, distinct file interaction(s) **408** further include sub-sections with data arranged according to event information such as distinct names, user context, process information, file data hashes, and values. Examples of sub-sections in distinct file interaction(s) **408** include user table(s) **418**, thread table(s) **420**, string table(s) **422**, other table(s) **424**, etc.

[0086] Distinct registry interaction(s) **410** include information indicating additions or deletions to registry settings of computer-based applications running on any one of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Examples of distinct registry interaction(s) **410** can include information indicating changes in registry settings, such as a name of a registry, a location of the registry, data in the registry, and so on. Other types of interactions **416** include information associated with various other activities, for example execution of certain files, and so on.

[0087] FIG. **5** illustrates an exemplary physical layout of an event block collection **500**. Event block collection **500** can be created by associating one or more event blocks **326** found in block storage **328**. In one implementation, one or more event blocks **326** are compressed to form event block collection **500**.

[0088] Event block collection **500** may be created by user daemon **312**, compressing module **310**, collection server **106** or any combination thereof. Moreover, event block collection **500** may be created in response to several stimuli. For example, event block collection **500** may be created once a certain amount of block storage **328** is filled. Alternately, in another possible implementation, event block collection **500** may be created periodically, such as after a given amount of time has elapsed.

[0089] Event block collection **500** includes a header **502** and a block storage area **504** including one or more blocks **506** and block table(s) **508**. Blocks **506** may be event blocks **326**, compressed event blocks **326**, or groupings of compressed or uncompressed event blocks **326**. References to memory addresses where compressed or uncompressed block events **326** in block **506** are stored are arranged in one or more block table(s) **508** to facilitate quick look-up of sought after events and their associated interactions. For example, block table(s) **508** may include the addresses of all blocks **506** in event block collection **500** including thread information associated with a certain user ID. In another possible implementation, block table(s) **508** may include memory addresses of all blocks **506** included in event block collection **500** associated with a spreadsheet program or which include a timestamp in a given time range.

[0090] Header **502** in event block collection **500** further includes information describing the contents of storage area **504**. In one implementation, header **502** includes versioning information **510**, section descriptor(s) **512** and block table descriptor(s) **514**. Versioning information **510** can include information relating to changes in event block collection **500**. For example, versioning information **510** can include information relating to changes made from a preceding version of event block collection **500** to arrive at a current event block collection **500**.

[0091] Section descriptor(s) **512** include start and end offsets indicating the beginning and the end of locations in memory, such as memory **304** and memory in collection server **106**, where elements such as user table(s) **414**, thread table(s) **416**, and so on are stored. Such offsets can be realized trough flags, pointers, etc. Similarly, block table descriptor(s) **514** can include start offset(s) **516** and end offset(s) **518** indicating the beginning and ends, respectively, of locations in memory, such as memory **304** or memory in collection server **106**, where block table(s) **508** are stored. Moreover, in one implementation, start offset(s) **516** and end offset(s) **518** within block table descriptor(s) **514** indicate the beginning and ending of memory locations in collection server **106**, where block tables **506** are stored.

[0092] Block table(s) **508** in storage area **504** include block entries **520**. Block entries **520** include start offsets **522** and end offsets **524** indicating the start and end respectively of blocks **506** stored in storage area **504**. Storage area **504** can be located in memory **304** or in memory of collection server **106**.

[0093] It will be understood that times of events may be represented in a variety of ways. For example, in one implementation, a table of event IDs may exist in which each ID is an index into distinct file/registry/module/process events. These IDs can be ordered according to how they were received. This order may be maintained in terms of the order in which the IDs were generated or measured.

[0094] It will also be understood that a table of timestamps may be maintained. Multiple events may have the same timestamp. In such a way, a table can be creating organizing information such as: (1) a timestamp; (2) an offset of a first event with this timestamp; and (3) an offset of a last event with this timestamp.

[0095] It will further be understood that the structures and techniques discussed in conjunction with FIGS. **4** and **5** can be used with a wide variety of data types (including data and commands associated with threads, various programs, platforms, and so on) and for a variety of different applications. For example, the structures and techniques discussed in conjunction with FIGS. **4** and **5** can be used in conjunction with compression and query improvements for arbitrary logs. Moreover, in one exemplary implementation, the structures and techniques discussed in conjunction with FIGS. **4** and **5** can be used to improve business intelligence across varied areas, including Ad Sense analysis of web traffic.

[0096] FIG. **6** illustrates an exemplary collection server **106** configured to store, process and/or analyze data from thread data recorder **108**. Collection server **106** includes one or more processor(s) **602** and a memory **604**. Processor(s) **602** include, for example, microprocessors, microcomputers, microcontrollers, digital signal processors, central pro-

cessing units, state machines, logic circuits, and/or any devices that manipulate signals based on operational instructions. Among other capabilities, processor(s) **602** are configured to fetch and execute computer-readable instructions stored in memory **604**.

[0097] Memory **604** may be any computer-readable medium known in the art, for example, volatile memory (e.g., RAM) and/or non-volatile memory (e.g., ROM, flash, and so on). Memory **604** can also include program(s) **606** and data **608**. Program(s) **606** can perform, among other operations, query-related processes on data associated with interactions between programs running on program layer **202** and file system **208**. Program(s) **606** further include, for example, query module **610**, operating system **612** and other application(s) **614**.

[0098] In operation, query module **610** performs query-based operations on information collected by thread data recorder **108**, such as information included in buffer memory **322**, block storage **328** and/or block storage **616**. Query(s) **618** can include a plurality of queries such as predefined queries or queries entered or programmed by one or more individuals or entities, such as a system administrator. For example, in one implementation, query(s) **618** can include instructions to detect all interactions associated with a given user ID. In another exemplary implementation, query(s) **618** can include instructions to detect all interactions associated with an application running on program layer **202**.

[0099] Query module **610** can restrict query(s) **618** to one or more attributes. Such attributes can include filename, application type, time of execution, and so on. To restrict a query by attribute, query module **610** scans block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for values that indicate the presence of the attribute. For example, if an individual wishes to search block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for data related to a certain application such as a word processor, query module **610** searches block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** by restricting query(s) **618** to search for entries or events in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** associated with the word processor.

[0100] In another possible implementation, further limitations can be provided in query(s) **618** to filter out data included within the retrieved results, and arrive at more selective search results. For example, query(s) **618** can be more complex, and include instructions to locate all interactions associated with a certain user ID, a certain application, and which have timestamps in a given range.

[0101] In one exemplary implementation, block storage **616** includes the same information stored in block storage **328**. In another possible implementation, block storage **616** includes information different from information found in block storage **328**. For example, block storage can include information retrieved from block storage **328**, which has been altered, such as through processes including compression and organization. Moreover, query module **610** can query either or both of bulk storage **328** and bulk storage **616**.

[0102] Data generated by program(s) **606**, such as through the execution of searches by query module **610**, can be stored in other data **620**. Additionally, data generated by program(s) **606** may be stored in buffering memory **622**, block storage **328**, and/or block storage **616**. In one possible implementation, buffer memory **622** can be located externally from collection server **106**.

[0103] Operating system **612** and other application(s) **614** provide a computing environment for the functioning of collection server **106**. Other application(s) **614** can include computer-based applications, like drivers and so on, that provide extended functionality to the running of collection server **106**. Other application(s) **614** can also include applications that may or may not operate in conjunction with query module **610** to perform specific functions like word processing, numerical processing, and so on.

[0104] As discussed above in conjunction with FIG. **1**, collection server **106** can store information in relation to interactions performed by one or more of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) of system **100**. In one implementation, query module **610** can be used to analyze the operation of system **100** on the basis of data captured from intercepted threads a various instrumented functions in system **100**. Query module **610** can do this by initiating a search of block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** using one or more queries from query(s) **618**. Results generated by the execution of query(s) **618** can be retrieved and analyzed by collection server **106** or by an analyzing server to assess the performance of system **100**. An exemplary analyzing server **700** is discussed in greater detail in conjunction with FIG. **7** below.

[0105] In another exemplary implementation, query module **610** can search through block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** by scanning through selected sections in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616**. Sections in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** can include normalized event information from event packets **324** stored in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** and organized or arranged on the basis of certain attributes. Examples of sections in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** include distinct PS interaction(s) **406**.

[0106] Block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** can be arranged in sections within data **308** and/or data **608** respectively. For example, event information related to the execution of an Internet browser can be associated with a section in distinct PS interaction(s) **406** stored within data **308** and/or **608**. Other applications running on program layer **202**, and event information associated with the applications, can be associated with different sections in data **308** and/or **608** unique to the applications.

[0107] Sections to be searched by query module **610**, such as distinct PS interaction(s) **406**, can be located using one or more attributes in query(s) **618**. Such attributes include filename, application type, time of execution, and so on. For example, if an individual wishes to search block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for data related to interactions associated with a spreadsheet application, query module **610** can search the interaction information in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** by restricting query(s) **618** to first search for sections in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** including information associated with the identity of the spreadsheet application.

[0108] In another implementation, query module **610** can return information associated with interactions regarding accesses to a particular file. Accesses can include actions such as reading and writing to a file, as well as executing operations associated with a file. For example, query module **610** can scan string table(s) **420** in block storage **328**, or block storage **616**, for information such as a filename for the particular file being accessed, an application accessing the particular file, and so on. After obtaining information from

string table(s) **420**, such as the filename of the particular file being accessed, query module **610** can locate a filename ID corresponding to the filename and query module **610** can further scan sections of distinct PS interaction(s) **406** to obtain event information associated with the filename ID.

[0109] Instances of event information associated with the filename ID under consideration can indicate accesses of files with the corresponding filenames. Thus, results generated by query module **610** can indicate all accesses to a particular file. In yet another implementation, query module **610** can gather information relating to a frequency of a particular file being accessed by ascertaining the number of times the specified interaction has taken place.

[0110] In another possible implementation, query module **610** can be used to detect leaked files. Leaked files include files or registry settings that are left on a system, such as system **100**, after a program that created the files or registry settings is uninstalled. To detect leaked files, query module **610** catalogues installation files and settings changes associated with each program loaded onto system **100**. Later, if the program is uninstalled, a corresponding catalog of installation files and settings for the program can be recalled, and system **100** can be checked to make sure all installation files and registry settings have been removed or reset.

[0111] In one exemplary implementation, to detect leaked files on computing-based device **102** query module **610** catalogues installation files by running a scan through computing-based device **102** to detect all programs, such as applications, installed on computing-based device **102**.

[0112] Query module **610** can also acquire a list of all programs registered in an installer database of operating system **314** running on operating system layer **206**. Examples of installer databases include components which produce a populated list of all programs installed on a computing-based device under consideration.

[0113] Query module **610** queries block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for registry information and enumerates a list of programs registered with operating system **314**. Query module **610** can then scan block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** and enumerate the files and registry entries of all programs installed on computing-based device **102**. In one exemplary implementation, to enumerate the files and registry entries, query module **610** can query for all files and registry entries corresponding to the program IDs of the programs installed on computing-based device **102**.

[0114] If a file or setting on computing-based device **102** is not included in the files and registry entries corresponding to the program IDs of the programs installed on computing-based device **102**, then query module **610** can deduce that the file or setting is a leaked file. Leaked files can be removed by query module **610**, or various other programs, including operating system **314**.

[0115] In another exemplary implementation, query module **610** can restrict a query using a time range. For example, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for all interactions occurring between a given start and end time. In one implementation, query module **610** can achieve this by performing a scan of timestamp stream **404** for all interactions in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** which have timestamps between the given start and end time.

[0116] In another exemplary implementation, query module **610** can detect stale processes due to changed files, settings, or stale modules, including common misconfigurations, old software versions, and so on. Stale processes occur when, for example, software upgrades fail to restart affected processes after replacing on-disk binaries, files, or settings. As a result, the computing-based device on which the stale process is found will disregard the upgrade and continue to execute based on the old binary, file, or setting.

[0117] To detect stale processes, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for the last-load time of software installed. Query module **610** can also query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for the last-load time of files or registry settings associated with the software installed. In one exemplary implementation, query module **610** queries block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for the last-load time of files or registry settings associated with the software associated dynamic link libraries (DLLs) installed with the software. Query module **610** can also query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for the time or date of the last modification of the software installed on the computing-based device. Such modifications include, for example, accesses performed on one or more files or program settings associated with the last known version of the installed software.

[0118] In case the last load time of the software is later than the time or date of the last known modification of the software, inconsistencies resulting from the software not utilizing the last loaded update, may occur. Such inconsistencies, if detected by the query module(s) **610**, can be noted and corrected by an individual such as a system administrator.

[0119] In another possible implementation, query module **610** can detect occurrences of known unwarranted programs including software applications such as malware, spyware, trojans, and so on. To accomplish this, query module **610** can query and search block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for programs loaded for execution in memory of one or more of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). The programs loaded for execution in memory may then be compared by, for example query module **610**, against a list of known unwarranted programs.

[0120] For example, query module **610** can detect occurrences of programs loaded for execution in memory on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) on the basis of identifiers, such as program IDs, associated with the programs. Query module **610** can then compare the identifiers of the programs loaded for execution in memory on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) against a list of identifiers, such as program IDs, of known unwarranted programs. If an identifier of a program loaded for execution in memory matches an identifier of a known unwarranted program, query module **610** may implement the removal of the program loaded for execution in memory from computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). In one implementation, the list of identifiers of known unwarranted programs can be stored in other data **620**. In another possible implementation, the list of identifiers of known unwarranted programs can be entered, at least in part, by a system administrator.

[0121] In another implementation, an unidentified program on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) which does not have an identifier associated with it can be detected by query module **610** and reported to a system administrator to ascertain whether the unidentified program is an unwarranted program or not. The system administrator can examine the nature of the unidentified program by examining a purpose of the unidentified program, dependence of the

unidentified program on other programs, and so on to determine if the unidentified program is unwarranted. Additionally, the system administrator can review past experience with programs having characteristics similar to those of the unidentified program to determine if the unidentified program is unwarranted.

[0122] If the system administrator determines that the unidentified program is unwarranted, the system administrator can implement the removal of the unidentified program from computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). For example, the system administrator can remove the unidentified program itself, or the system administrator can instruct elements of computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) and collection server **106**, including thread data recorder **108**, query module **610**, and so on, to remove the unidentified program from computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0123] Additionally, the system administrator may assign an identifier, such as a program ID, to the unidentified program, and include the identifier on a list of unwarranted programs. In this way, if the unidentified program appears on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) it can be quickly identified as an unwarranted program by elements of computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) and collection server **106**. Moreover, the removal of the unidentified program can be implemented by elements of computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) and collection server **106**.

[0124] In yet another possible implementation, query module **610** can also detect extensibility points (EPs). EPs are items in the persistent state that can cause dynamic loading and execution of instructions associated with a program running on program layer **202**, or instructions associated with an operating system running on operating system layer **206**. For example, a direct extensibility point associated with a first program—such as a word processor, a spreadsheet application and so on—implements execution of the first program by, for example, interacting with elements such as file system **208**, operating system layer **206**, etc.

[0125] Direct extensibility points can be detected by query module **610**. For example, query module **610** can detect direct EPs by isolating interactions which both (1) pertain to various programs loaded in system memory for execution before the execution of the first program, and (2) which reference the first program or are associated with the running of the first program.

[0126] In one exemplary implementation, query module **610** can identify potential direct EPs for the first program by querying block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for interactions pertaining to various programs loaded in system memory for execution before execution of the first program. For example, query module **610** can query for interactions pertaining to various programs loaded in system memory for execution within a given time range, such as 2 seconds, before the execution of the first program. Query module **610** can identify direct EPs associated with the first program from the potential EPs by querying the potential EPs for interactions that reference the first program or are associated with the running of the first program. In one possible implementation, direct EPs can be stored in buffer memory **620**.

[0127] In addition to direct extensibility points, indirect extensibility points may also exist. For example, on starting-up, the first program may also trigger instructions associated with secondary programs, such as add on programs, to provide additional functionality to the running of the first program. One or more indirect extensibility points associated with the secondary programs and/or the first program can implement execution of the secondary programs by, for example, interacting with elements which may include the first program, file system **208**, operating system layer **206**, etc. Query module **610** can be used to detect indirect EPs. In one exemplary implementation, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for interactions which are associated with the first program and/or the secondary programs. Moreover, in one possible implementation, indirect EPs can be stored in buffer memory **620**.

[0128] It will also be understood that the term secondary programs may include a broad range of programs operating within a system. Returning to the example above, secondary programs may include add on programs to existing secondary programs. In this way, secondary programs may be associated with secondary programs, which are themselves associated with secondary programs, and so on.

[0129] Further, the term indirect extensibility points will be understood to include extensibility points associated with add on programs to the various secondary programs running in a system.

[0130] In one implementation, event information associated with the various interactions between the first program, the secondary programs, and file system **208** can be used to estimate other characteristics associated with the first program and/or the secondary programs. For example, event information associated with the various interactions can be used to estimate the amount of memory used by the first program and/or the secondary programs, as well as the amount of processing overhead used by the first program and/or the secondary programs, and so on.

[0131] The various interactions generated as a result of the running of the first program and the secondary programs can be intercepted and copied by, for example, thread data recorder **108**. Event information associated with the various interactions can be stored as described above in memory **304**, such as in event packets **324** and event blocks **326**, and in memory **604**, such as in block storage **616**. The stored event information can be reviewed by entities, such as a system administrator, to detect interactions associated with the first program and the secondary programs. In this way, the secondary programs associated with the running of the first program can be detected.

[0132] Query module **610** can also be used to detect a presence of malicious software applications by monitoring direct EPs. Malicious software applications can include applications such as spyware, trojans, worms, viruses, and so on which under normal circumstances would not be associated with a program. For example, query module **610** can compare EPs for a program running on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) against control EPs for the same program found when the program was run on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in the absence of malicious software. Differences between the EPs and the control EPs can be examined by entities such as query module **610** and a system administrator, to determine if the differences indicate the presence of malicious software running in conjunction with the program. In one implementation, malicious software found using EPs can be removed from computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) by query module **610**, thread data recorder **108**, the system administrator, and so on.

[0133] FIGS. **7-8** illustrate how data collected by collection server **106** may be analyzed using activity bursts. For example, FIG. **7** illustrates an exemplary analyzing server **700** for performing analysis on data collected by collection server **106**. As will be described in more detail below, in one exemplary implementation, analyzing server **700** analyzes data collected by collection server **106** through analysis of activity bursts.

[0134] Analyzing server **700** includes one or more processor(s) **702** and a memory **704**. Processor(s) **702** include, for example, microprocessors, microcomputers, microcontrollers, digital signal processors, central processing units, state machines, logic circuitries, and/or any devices that manipulate signals based on operational instructions. Among other capabilities, processor(s) **702** are configured to fetch and execute computer-readable instructions stored in memory **704**.

[0135] Memory **704** may be any computer-readable medium known in the art, including volatile memory (e.g., RAM) and/or non-volatile memory (e.g., ROM, flash, etc.). Memory **704** includes analysis module(s) **706** and data **708**.

[0136] In operation, analysis module(s) **706**, among other things, monitor activity of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in system **100**, and analyze data collected by collection server **106**. Data generated by analysis module(s) **706**, or data required during the course of execution of analysis module(s) **706**, is stored in data **708**. The activity of system **100**, such as interactions between programs running on program layer **202** and files and/or settings in file system **208** among the various computing-based devices **102**, **104** (*a*)-(*n*) can be represented through the use of activity bursts.

[0137] As shown in FIG. **8** an activity burst **800** includes a group of interactions, with each interaction being separated by a gap interval **802**. Though the discussion below describes intervals on the horizontal axis in FIG. **8** as being based on time, it will be understood that these intervals—and the horizontal axis in FIG. **8**—can be based on other dimensions as well. For example, in addition to including clusters of related activity along the time dimension, activity bursts **800** can also include clusters of activity along other dimensions (such as groupings of activities by user, a given program, and so on). In this manner, bursts of activity along many assorted dimensions can be found and investigated.

[0138] Returning the implementation illustrated in FIG. **8**, activity bursts can include activity responses **804** corresponding to individual interactions that occur close together in time, within one or more threads. An activity response **804** corresponds to any usage of resources, such as memory and processors, of computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in the execution of threads that result in interactions. Exemplary instances of when interactions may generate an activity response **804** include processing done by a processing unit, such as processor(s) **302**, and memory, such as memory **304**, utilized during execution of a thread resulting in an interaction. Further exemplary instances of when interactions may generate an activity response **804** include activity of peripheral units including memory and one or more processors, such as printers, scanners, and similar devices used for, or in conjunction with, computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). In FIG. **8**, the height of an activity response **804** corresponds to the use of resources of computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) during the execution of a thread with which the activity response **804** is associated.

[0139] Activity responses **804** are separated by gap intervals **802**, with gap interval **802** being smaller than an inactivity interval **806** between activity bursts **800**. In one implementation, inactivity interval **806** is a period of time between a last activity response **808** in an activity burst **800**(*a*) and a first activity response **810** in an adjacent activity burst **800**(*b*).

[0140] In one implementation, gap interval **802** can be the time required for a single interaction to take place. Moreover, in one exemplary embodiment, activity bursts **800** can be defined as a group of interactions $\{et \backslash i \leqq t \leqq j\}$ where

[0141] gap $(e_t, e_{t+1})<k$ for all $i \leqq t \leqq j$;

[0142] gap $(e_{i-1}, e_i)>k$;

[0143] gap $(e_j, e_{j+1})>k$.

[0144] Given that gap (x,y) is a time interval between two interactions x and y corresponding to separate activity responses **804**; and k is a threshold gap between adjacent activity responses **804**. In one exemplary implementation, k is approximately sixty seconds.

[0145] Returning to FIG. **7**, analyzing server **700** can analyze activity burst **800** through the use of a signature module **710**, activity burst analyzing module **712**, an operating system **714** and other application(s) **716** in analysis module(s) **706**. Similarly analyzing server **700** can store information regarding activity bursts in data **708**, which can include signed activity burst(s) **718** and other data **720**.

[0146] The activity burst analyzing module **712** monitors activity bursts **800** of system **100** for similarity. Similar activity bursts **800** are indicative of the execution of similar threads generated by a specific program. On encountering similar activity bursts **800**, signature module **710** can assign a signature to the similar activity bursts **800**, and the signature can be stored in signed activity burst(s) **718**. In one possible implementation, signature module **710** calculates the signature to be assigned to similar activity bursts **800** on the basis of attributes that characterize the interactions included in activity bursts **800**. For example, signature module **710** can arrive at a signature to be assigned to an activity burst by hashing filenames of files associated with an interaction, type of interaction, and so on. Moreover, signature module **710** can arrive at a signature to be assigned to an activity burst by hashing file paths, and hashing identifiers of activity types.

[0147] An activity burst **800** encountered by analyzing server **700** can be compared against activity bursts **800** stored in signed activity burst(s) **718**. If the activity burst **800** is similar to an activity burst **800** stored in activity burst(s) **718**, the activity burst **800** can be assigned the signature of the similar activity burst in signed activity burst(s) **718** by signature module **710**.

[0148] In one exemplary implementation, the same signature may be assigned by signature module **710** to all activity bursts **800** corresponding to one or more interactions with temporary files. Temporary files include files that are created during installation of a program on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*), and changes in temporary files appear as interactions in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616**.

[0149] In yet another exemplary implementation, interactions corresponding to known unwarranted or unauthorized actions—as defined by a system administrator, for example—can be prevented by associating an activity burst **800** for such actions with a forbidden action signature. For example, known unwarranted or unauthorized actions, such as unauthorized read and/or write operations to one or more

files, and unauthorized read and/or write operations to registry settings, can be assigned a forbidden action signature by signature module **710**. When an activity burst **800** having a forbidden action signature is detected (by analyzing module **712**, thread data recorder **108**, etc) elements including activity burst analyzing module **712** and thread data recorder **108**, can prohibit the execution of one or more threads associated with activity burst **800** by blocking transmission of the one or more threads to file system **208**.

[0150] In another possible implementation, analyzing server **700** can identify the presence of unwarranted or rogue programs by detecting an occurrence of a signature associated with an activity burst **800** corresponding to the unwarranted or rogue programs. When the signature for such an activity burst **800** is detected by the activity burst analyzing module **712**, elements including activity burst analyzing module **712** and thread data recorder **108**, can prohibit the execution of one or more threads associated with activity burst **800** by preventing calling by one or more threads to file system **208**. Moreover, elements including thread data recorder **108**, activity burst analyzing module **712** and a system administrator, can analyze threads associated with activity burst **800** corresponding to the unwarranted or rogue programs to isolate an identity or location of the unwarranted or rogue programs. Elements including thread data recorder **108**, activity burst analyzing module **712** and a system administrator, can also remove the unwarranted or rogue programs from computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0151] In yet another possible implementation, security auditing of access to files, settings, or modules can be tracked using activity burst analyzing module **712**. For example, access to files, settings, or binaries can be restricted by vetoing any access made from threads or programs that are not within a set policy allowing access. In such an implementation, access can be granted based on a running instance of a program. For example, the set policy may restrict access to certain documents to a word processor, rather than individual users. In such an implementation, thread based interception can be used to identify applications making calls to certain documents and verify that the application may be granted access according to the policy.

[0152] In another possible implementation, thread interception and analysis can be used to block copying of files to network drives or removable locations by vetoing writes to such locations based on a program or thread that was running. Moreover, thread interception and analysis can be used to conduct security auditing. For example, by monitoring interactions with files on a system, the copying of copyrighted or otherwise protected or sensitive material to CDs or other removable devices can be detected.

[0153] Additionally, thread interception and analysis can also be used to forensically reconstruct a system. For example, auditing logs created using thread based interception can be used after a hacker has broken in to a system to reconstruct the system and ameliorate changes the hacker made to the system.

Exemplary Method(s)

[0154] Exemplary methods for thread interception and analysis are described with reference to FIGS. **1** to **8**. These exemplary methods may be described in the general context of computer executable instructions. Generally, computer executable instructions can include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, procedures, modules, functions, and the like that perform particular functions or implement particular abstract data types. The methods may also be practiced in a distributed computing environment where functions are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, computer executable instructions may be located in both local and remote computer storage media, including memory storage devices.

[0155] FIG. **9** illustrates an exemplary method **900** for intercepting threads and capturing data associated with the threads. The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof.

[0156] At block **902**, one or more functions running on a system are instrumented to include modified function code. In one implementation, the one or more functions can be instrumented by modifying computer readable instructions associated with the one or more functions. For example, the computer readable instructions can be modified to instruct the one or more functions to intercept threads calling the one or more functions and capture data associated with the threads. For example, in one implementation, a thread data recorder, such as thread data recorder **108**, can instrument one or more functions in system **100**. The functions may be in any operating layer **202**, **204**, **206**. In one possible implementation, choke point functions are instrumented to include code for intercepting threads calling the choke point functions, and capturing data associated with the threads.

[0157] At block **904**, a thread associated with a program running on a system is intercepted as the thread calls an instrumented function including modified function code. In one implementation, the instrumented function logs a stream of events associated with the thread as the thread executes. Threads are associated with programs and therefore program information can be obtained when a thread is examined by an instrumented function the thread calls into. A timestamp for each interaction can be assigned by the instrumented function.

[0158] For example, in one implementation, a thread data recorder, such as thread data recorder **108**, can intercept threads calling modified functions in system **100**. Programs with which the threads are associated may be running in one of several operating layers, such as program layer **202**, middleware layer **204**, operating system layer **206**, etc. A file system, such as file system **208**, with which the program may be trying to interact can include files (such as data files, executable files), and settings information (such as configuration settings or registry settings), and so on.

[0159] At block **906**, various information associated with the thread, including interaction being instigated by the thread, is copied and transmitted into a memory location, grouped together as an event. For example, a duplicating module, such as duplicating module **318**, can copy all or selected data associated with the thread and store the data in a memory location, such as buffer memory **322**. Information associated with the thread can include any information regarding interactions instigated by the thread, as well as any

information regarding the system at the point the thread executes the modified function code at the instrumented function.

[0160] Buffer memory **322** can, in one implementation, be either internally or externally located with respect to computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0161] At block **908**, data stored in the memory location is compressed. In one implementation, data, such as event packets **324** stored in buffer memory **322**, is compressed by compressing module **310** into an event block **326**. Compression may be effected by a service, such as, for example user daemon **312**. In one instance compression may be instigated when a processor (to be used to perform the compression) is being used at or below a predetermined activity level. In one implementation, the compressed data can be stored in another memory location. For example, the compressed data can be stored in block storage **328** rather than buffer memory **322**.

[0162] At block **910**, the compressed data is periodically uploaded for analysis. In one implementation, the compressed data may be uploaded to a collection server **106** or to a memory location serving as a collection server **106**. The periodicity of uploading the compressed data for analysis can be varied. In one implementation, the compressed data is uploaded after specified intervals of time. In another possible implementation, the compressed data can be uploaded when the compressed data exceeds a predefined threshold limit of memory.

[0163] FIG. **10** illustrates an exemplary method **1000** for adding normalized events to an ordered event stream in one or more computing-based devices. Normalization of events in an ordered event stream reduces redundancy of data. The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof.

[0164] At block **1002**, logs of compressed data are created by one or more computing-based devices in a system. For example, a service, such as user daemon **312**, copies data intercepted by a thread data recorder, such as thread data recorder **108** for compression. The data is compressed and stored as a compressed log format, such as an event block **326**, in a memory location, such as block storage **328**. In one implementation, compression may be instigated when a processor (to be used to perform the compression) is being used at or below a predetermined activity level

[0165] At block **1004**, information associated with events corresponding to intercepted threads is normalized. In one implementation, normalization includes grouping together related information, such as information associated with events corresponding to the execution of a word processor program.

[0166] For example, attributes of different interactions occurring within system **100** can be normalized into one or more sections of distinct PS interaction(s) **406** such as distinct file interaction(s) **408**, distinct registry interaction(s) **410**, process table(s) **412**, module table(s) **414**, and other interaction(s) **416**. In one possible implementation, distinct file interaction(s) **408** further include sections including information such as distinct names, user context, process information, file data hashes, and values, which can be stored in user table(s) **418**, thread table(s) **420**, string table(s) **422**, other table(s) **424**, etc.

[0167] At block **1006**, newly normalized information associated with events is added to preexisting categories of similar normalized information associated with events. For example, blocks of normalized information associated with events, such as event blocks **326**, can be added to similar normalized information in previously created event blocks **326** already stored in block storage **328**. Returning to our example above, newly normalized information associated with the execution of the word processor can be added to preexisting normalized information associated with prior executions of the word processor.

[0168] In the event that no preexisting categories of normalized information associated with events exist which shares similarities with the newly normalized information, a new category can be created and the newly normalized information associated with events can be stored in the new category.

[0169] At block **1008**, all of the existing categories of normalized information associated with events are merged into an ordered event stream. For example, normalized information associated with events stored in block storage **328** is merged into event stream **404**.

[0170] FIG. **11** illustrates an exemplary method **1100** for detecting leaked entries that have been left behind as a result of uninstalling a program from a computing-based device. The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof

[0171] At block **1102**, installation files and settings changes associated with each program loaded onto a computing-based device and/or system are cataloged and enumerated. In one implementation, enumeration-includes creating a list of programs registered with an operating system of the computing-based device.

[0172] For example, a system can be scanned to detect all programs that are installed on computing-based devices in the system as well as all operating system installation files associated with the programs on the computing-based devices. All programs installed on the computing-based devices and/or all operating system installation files associated with the programs may be enumerated by placing them in a list.

[0173] In one possible implementation, query module **610** runs a scan through system **100** detecting all programs that are installed on one or more computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) to catalogue and enumerate all operating system installation files on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). For example, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for all programs registered with operating system **314** of one or more of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in system **100**. The programs found may be cataloged and enumerated by a variety of devices, such as query module **610**, thread data recorder **108**, and so on. Moreover, all operating system installation files

on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) associated with the programs found may be cataloged and enumerated by a variety of devices, such as query module **610**, thread data recorder **108**, and so on.

[0174] At block **1104**, all files and registry settings present on a computing-based device and/or system, including files and registry settings associated with uninstalled programs, are enumerated. This can involve the scanning of memory on the computing-based device and/or system for files and registry settings of all programs that have been installed on the computing-based device and/or system—including files and registry settings for programs that have been uninstalled. For example, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** to obtain all files and registry settings corresponding to identifiers, such as program IDs, of all programs that have been installed on computing based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0175] At block **1106**, the files and registry settings associated with programs registered with the operating system are compared against the files and registry settings of programs that have been installed on the computing-based device and/or system. For example, query module **610** can compare identifiers, such as program IDs, of the enumerated files and registry settings associated with the programs registered with the operating system of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) against identifiers of files or settings of all programs which have been installed on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0176] At block **1108**, files and registry settings associated with programs on both lists can be excluded from consideration. The remaining files and registry settings, which represent files and registry settings corresponding to programs that have been uninstalled from the computing-based device and/or system can be termed leaked files, and can be removed from the computing-based device and/or system. For example, query module **610** can correlate identifiers, such as program IDs, of files and registry settings associated with programs registered with operating system **314** of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) with identifiers of files and registry settings associated with programs that have been installed on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). The files and registry settings associated with the non correlated programs can be termed leaked files by query module **610**, and can be removed from computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) by elements such as thread data recorder **108** and query module **610**.

[0177] FIG. **12** illustrates an exemplary method **1200** for detecting stale files including common misconfigurations, old software versions etc., installed on a computing-based device. Stale binaries occur when, for example, software upgrades fail to restart affected processes after replacing on-disk binaries. As a result, the computing-based device on which the stale binary is found will disregard the upgrade and continue to execute the old program from the old binary. The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof.

[0178] At block **1202**, programs loaded onto a computing-based device and/or system are cataloged and enumerated. In one implementation, enumeration includes creating a list of programs registered with an operating system of the computing-based device. For example, a system can be scanned to detect all programs that are installed on computing-based devices in the system. All programs installed on the computing-based devices may be enumerated by placing them in a list.

[0179] In one possible implementation, query module **610** runs a scan through system **100** detecting all programs that are registered on one or more computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) to catalog and enumerate all programs registered with operating system **314** on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). For example, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for all programs registered with operating system **314** of one or more of computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in system **100**. The programs found may be cataloged and enumerated by a variety of devices and/or entities, such as query module **610**, thread data recorder **108**, and so on.

[0180] At block **1204**, last load times of all programs registered on a computing-based device and/or system, as well as DLLs associated with the programs registered on the computing-based device and/or system, are acquired. For example, query module **610** queries block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for the last-load times of programs registered on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) and/or last-load times of dynamic link libraries (DLLs) installed with the programs registered on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in system **100**.

[0181] At block **1206**, last modification times of files or settings associated with programs registered on a computing-based device and/or system are acquired and compared with the last-load times of the programs. For example, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for a time or date of the last modification of a program registered with operating system **314** on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Query module **610** can compare the time or date of the last modification with a last load time of the program.

[0182] At block **1208**, any inconsistencies found during the comparison are noted. For example, in case a last load time of a program registered on a computing-based device and/or system is earlier than a time or date of a last known modification of the program, it is possible that the program has not responded to the last modification. In such a case, an error report may be issued to entities such as a user or a system administrator, reporting that the program is not responding to the last attempted modification. Alternately, an attempt may be made to cause the program to load the modified version.

[0183] In one exemplary implementation, query module **610** can query for both a last load time and a last modification time of a program registered with operating system **314** on computing based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*) in system **100**. Query module **610** can compare the last load time and the last modification time and if the last load time of the program is earlier than the last modification time of the program, query module **610** can issue an error report to entities such as a user or a system administrator, reporting that the program is not responding to the last attempted modification. Query module **610** can also attempt to cause the program to load the modified version.

[0184] FIG. **13** illustrates an exemplary method **1300** for detecting one or more extensibility points (EPs) of a program installed on a computing-based device. EPs include interactions that control the dynamic loading and execution of a computer application. The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof.

[0185] At block **1302**, previous interactions (i.e. interactions pertaining to various programs loaded for execution in a system memory before the execution of a first program) are checked. For example, query module **610** can identify potential direct extensibility points (EPs) associated with a first program by querying block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for interactions pertaining to various programs loaded into memory **304** for execution before execution of the first program. In one exemplary implementation, query module **610** can query for interactions pertaining to various programs loaded in memory **304** for execution within a given time range, such as two seconds, before execution of the first program.

[0186] At block **1304**, a check is performed to find previous interactions which reference a filename of the first program loaded for execution in system memory of a computing-based device. For example, query module **610** can query for interactions associated with various programs referencing the first program or which are associated with the execution of the first program on computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Query module **610** can query for interactions including various attributes, such as a filename of the first program, a program ID of the first program, and so on.

[0187] At block **1306**, the previous interactions referencing the filename of the first program are flagged as direct EPs. For example, query module **610** can identify direct EPs associated with the first program by querying for all previous interactions which reference the first program or which are associated with the execution of the first program.

[0188] In one implementation, other interactions associated with various secondary programs referencing the direct EPs, are termed as indirect EPs. For example, query module **610** can query block storage **328** and/or block storage **616** for all interactions which both (1) are associated with the various secondary programs loaded for execution in memory **304** before the execution of the first program and which (2) also reference any of the direct EPs, or which reference indirect EPs (associated with secondary programs).

[0189] In yet another possible implementation, indirect EPs can also be determined by locating interactions that reference direct or indirect EPs.

[0190] FIG. **14** illustrates an exemplary method **1400** for detecting one or more activity bursts due to the interactions of program(s) running on a computing-based device. The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof.

[0191] At block **1402**, one or more activity bursts are received. For example, activity bursts can be received by analyzing server **700** and can correspond to prior interactions received from an external storage device, such as collection server **106**. Alternately, activity bursts can be received dynamically from computing devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0192] In one implementation, activity bursts can include activity responses corresponding to individual interactions that occur close together in time, within one or more threads. Alternately, activity bursts can include activity responses corresponding to individual interactions grouped on the bases of other dimensions, such as groupings of activities by user, a given program, and so on. Moreover, individual activity responses in activity bursts can correspond to a usage of resources, such as memory and processors, of a computing-based device in the execution of threads that result in interactions.

[0193] At block **1404**, activity bursts which are similar, including activity bursts which differ slightly from one another, are assigned similar signatures. In one implementation, activity bursts can differ slightly from one another by including a small number of different activity responses and/or a small number of different times between activity responses.

[0194] For example, similar activity bursts **800** are indicative of execution of similar threads generated by a specific program. An activity burst analyzing module **712** can monitor activity bursts **800** of system **100** for similarity. On encountering similar activity bursts **800**, signature module **710** can assign similar signatures, which can be the same or can differ only slightly from one another, to the similar activity bursts **800**. Moreover, the similar signatures and/or the activity bursts **800** which have been assigned the similar signatures can be stored in signed activity burst(s) **718**.

[0195] At block **1406**, a same signature can be assigned to activity bursts associated with interactions with temporary files. Temporary files can include files that are created during installation of a program on computing-based devices, such as computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). In one possible implementation, changes in temporary files appear as interactions in block storage **328** and/or block storage **616**. Hence all interactions associated with temporary files can be assigned the same signature by the signature module **710**.

[0196] At block **1408**, activity bursts assigned similar or same signatures are cataloged according to the similar or same signature. For example, signature module **710** can store an activity burst **800** which has newly been assigned a same or similar signature in signed activity burst(s) **718**. In one implementation signed activity burst(s) **718** may further be arranged according to specific criteria, such as by programs associated with a generation of activity bursts **800**, or by interactions associated with activity bursts **800**, and so on.

[0197] FIG. **15** illustrates an exemplary method **1500** for prohibiting execution of unauthorized interactions—as defined by a system administrator, for example—on a computing-based device. Examples of unauthorized interactions include read and/or write actions performed on a file system by an entity or program not authorized to do such an action.

[0198] The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof.

[0199] At block **1502**, an activity burst having a signature is received. For example, an activity burst **800** can be received dynamically from computing devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Activity bursts include activity responses corresponding to individual interactions that occur close together in time, within one or more threads. Individual activity responses in activity bursts correspond to a usage of resources, such as memory and processors, of a computing-based device in the execution of threads that result in interactions.

[0200] At block **1504**, the signature of the activity burst is compared with signatures indicative of unauthorized interactions. For example, activity burst analyzing module **712** can compare the signature of the received activity burst with one or more forbidden action signatures in signed activity burst **718**. Forbidden action signatures are indicative of unauthorized interactions forbidden by entities such as a system administrator, from taking place on computing devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0201] At block **1506**, it is determined whether the activity burst corresponds to an unauthorized interaction. For example, if the signature of the activity burst does not correspond to a signature indicative of an unauthorized interaction ('no' path from block **1506**), the interactions associated with the activity burst can be allowed to proceed (block **1508**). Alternately, if the signature of the activity burst does correspond to a signature indicative of an unauthorized interaction ('yes' path from block **1506**), the interactions associated with the activity burst are not allowed to proceed (block **1510**).

[0202] In one exemplary implementation, activity burst analyzing module **712** can compare the signature of the activity burst with the forbidden action signatures in signed activity burst(s) **718**, and determine whether the activity burst corresponds to an unauthorized action. If activity burst analyzing module **712** determines that the signature of the activity burst does not correspond to an unauthorized interaction, the interactions corresponding to the activity burst are allowed. Alternately, if activity burst analyzing module **712** determines that the signature of the activity burst corresponds to an unauthorized interaction, the interactions corresponding to the activity burst are prohibited. Prohibition can be implemented by entities such as a system administrator and activity burst analyzing module **712**.

[0203] FIG. **16** illustrates an exemplary method **1600** for detecting rogue programs on one or more computing-based devices. Examples of rogue programs include spyware, malware, trojans, etc. and other programs that execute on a computing-based device causing undesirable or unwarranted activities. The order in which the method is described is not intended to be construed as a limitation, and any number of the described method blocks can be combined in any order to implement the method, or an alternate method. Additionally, individual blocks may be deleted from the method without departing from the spirit and scope of the subject matter described herein. Furthermore, the method can be implemented in any suitable hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof.

[0204] At block **1602**, an activity burst having a signature is received. For example, an activity burst can be received by analyzing server **700** and can correspond to prior interactions received from an external storage device, such as collection server **106**. Alternately, the activity burst can be received dynamically from computing devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). Activity bursts include activity responses corresponding to individual interactions that occur close together in time, within one or more threads. Individual activity responses in activity bursts correspond to a usage of resources, such as memory and processors, of a computing-based device in the execution of threads that result in interactions.

[0205] At block **1604**, the signature of the activity burst is compared with stored signatures associated with known and allowable activity bursts. For example, activity burst analyzing module **712** can compare the signature of the activity burst with one or more signatures associated with known and allowable activity bursts in signed activity burst(s) **718**.

[0206] If the signature of the activity burst corresponds to a signature of a known and allowable activity burst ('yes' path from block **1604**), then the activity burst is validated as being allowable, and interactions associated with the activity burst can be allowed to be executed (block **1606**). For example, activity burst analyzing module **712**, on determining that the signature of the activity burst is similar to a signature of a valid activity burst, can indicate that the activity burst is valid and can allow interactions associated with the activity burst to be executed.

[0207] Alternately, if the signature of the activity burst is not found to correspond to a signature associated with a known and allowable activity burst ('no' path from block **1604**), a determination can be made whether the interaction is due to the activity of an unwarranted or rogue program (block **1608**).

[0208] If the signature of the activity burst is similar to any signatures of known rogue activity bursts ('yes' path from block **1608**), then a program associated with the interactions included in the activity burst can be deduced to be a rogue program and be removed (block **1610**). Moreover, the interactions associated with the activity burst can be blocked from being executed.

[0209] For example, activity burst analyzing module **712** can compare the signature of the activity burst to signatures associated with activity bursts including interactions with rogue programs on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*). If the signature of the activity burst is similar to any of the signatures associated with activity bursts including interactions with rogue programs on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*), activity burst analyzing module **712** can identify the interactions associated with the activity burst as being due to one or more rogue programs. Entities including thread data recorder **108**, activity burst analyzing module **712** and a system administrator, can remove the rogue program(s) and/or prohibit execution of threads associated with the activity burst.

[0210] Alternately, if the signature of the activity burst is not similar to any signatures of known rogue activity bursts ('no' path from block **1608**), the activity burst can be examined to determine whether the activity burst is associated with one or more stale files (block **1612**). If it is found that the activity burst is associated with stale files ('yes' path

from block **1612**) the stale files may be removed (block **1614**). Alternately, if it is found that the activity burst is not associated with stale files ('no' path from block **1612**), an entity such as a system administrator may be presented with a message reporting the existence of the activity burst (block **1616**). Moreover, threads associated with the activity burst may be prohibited from being executed.

[0211] For example, if activity burst analyzing module **712** does not find the signature of the activity burst to be similar to any of the signatures associated with activity bursts including interactions with rogue programs on computing-based devices **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*), activity burst analyzing module **712** can check to see if the activity burst is due to interactions caused as a result of the execution of stale files. In one possible implementation, activity burst analyzing module **712** can compare the signature of the activity burst with signatures of activity bursts associated with the execution of stale files stored in signed activity burst(s) **718**. If the signatures are similar, elements including thread data recorder **108**, activity burst analyzing module **712** and a system administrator, can remove the stale files from computing-based device **102**, **104**(*a*)-(*n*).

[0212] Alternately, if the signature of the activity burst is not similar to signatures of activity bursts associated with the execution of stale files stored in signed activity burst(s) **718**, activity burst analyzing module **712** can present an entity such as a system administrator with a message reporting the existence of the activity burst. Additionally, entities including thread data recorder **108**, activity burst analyzing module **712** and a system administrator, can prohibit execution of the threads associated with the activity burst.

Exemplary Computer Environment

[0213] FIG. **17** illustrates an exemplary general computer environment **1700**, which can be used to implement the techniques described herein, and which may be representative, in whole or in part, of elements described herein. The computer environment **1700** is only one example of a computing environment and is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of the computer and network architectures. Neither should the computer environment **1700** be interpreted as having any dependency or requirement relating to any one or combination of components illustrated in the example computer environment **1700**.

[0214] Computer environment **1700** includes a general-purpose computing-based device in the form of a computer **1702**. Computer **1702** can be, for example, a desktop computer, a handheld computer, a notebook or laptop computer, a server computer, a game console, and so on. The components of computer **1702** can include, but are not limited to, one or more processors or processing units **1704**, a system memory **1706**, and a system bus **1708** that couples various system components including the processor **1704** to the system memory **1706**.

[0215] The system bus **1708** represents one or more of any of several types of bus structures, including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, an accelerated graphics port, and a processor or local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, such architectures can include an Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, a Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, an Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, a Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, and a Peripheral Component Interconnects (PCI) bus also known as a Mezzanine bus.

[0216] Computer **1702** typically includes a variety of computer readable media. Such media can be any available media that is accessible by computer **1702** and includes both volatile and non-volatile media, removable and non-removable media.

[0217] The system memory **1706** includes computer readable media in the form of volatile memory, such as random access memory (RAM) **1710**, and/or non-volatile memory, such as read only memory (ROM) **1712**. A basic input/output system (BIOS) **1714**, containing the basic routines that help to transfer information between elements within computer **1702**, such as during start-up, is stored in ROM **1712**. RAM **1710** typically contains data and/or program modules that are immediately accessible to and/or presently operated on by the processing unit **1704**.

[0218] Computer **1702** may also include other removable/non-removable, volatile/non-volatile computer storage media. By way of example, FIG. **17** illustrates a hard disk drive **1716** for reading from and writing to a non-removable, non-volatile magnetic media (not shown), a magnetic disk drive **1718** for reading from and writing to a removable, non-volatile magnetic disk **1720** (e.g., a "floppy disk"), and an optical disk drive **1722** for reading from and/or writing to a removable, non-volatile optical disk **1724** such as a CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, or other optical media. The hard disk drive **1716**, magnetic disk drive **1718**, and optical disk drive **1722** are each connected to the system bus **1708** by one or more data media interfaces **1726**. Alternately, the hard disk drive **1716**, magnetic disk drive **1718**, and optical disk drive **1722** can be connected to the system bus **1708** by one or more interfaces (not shown).

[0219] The disk drives and their associated computer-readable media provide non-volatile storage of computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules, and other data for computer **1702**. Although the example illustrates a hard disk **1716**, a removable magnetic disk **1720**, and a removable optical disk **1724**, it is to be appreciated that other types of computer readable media which can store data that is accessible by a computer, such as magnetic cassettes or other magnetic storage devices, flash memory cards, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical storage, random access memories (RAM), read only memories (ROM), electrically erasable programmable read-only memory (EEPROM), and the like, can also be utilized to implement the exemplary computing system and environment.

[0220] Any number of program modules can be stored on the hard disk **1716**, magnetic disk **1720**, optical disk **1724**, ROM **1712**, and/or RAM **1710**, including by way of example, an operating system **1727**, one or more application programs **1728**, other program modules **1730**, and program data **1732**. Each of such operating system **1727**; one or more application programs **1728**, other program modules **1730**, and program data **1732** (or some combination thereof) may implement all or part of the resident components that support the distributed file system.

[0221] A user can enter commands and information into computer **1702** via input devices such as a keyboard **1734** and a pointing device **1736** (e.g., a "mouse"). Other input devices **1738** (not shown specifically) may include a microphone, joystick, game pad, satellite dish, serial port, scanner, and/or the like. These and other input devices are connected

to the processing unit **1504** via input/output interfaces **1740** that are coupled to the system bus **1708**, but may be connected by other interface and bus structures, such as a parallel port, game port, or a universal serial bus (USB).

[0222] A monitor **1742** or other type of display device can also be connected to the system bus **1708** via an interface, such as a video adapter **1744**. In addition to the monitor **1742**, other output peripheral devices can include components such as speakers (not shown) and a printer **1746** which can be connected to computer **1702** via the input/output interfaces **1740**.

[0223] Computer **1702** can operate in a networked environment using logical connections to one or more remote computers, such as a remote computing-based device **1748**. By way of example, the remote computing-based device **1748** can be a personal computer, portable computer, a server, a router, a network computer, a peer device or other common network node, and the like. The remote computing-based device **1748** is illustrated as a portable computer that can include many or all of the elements and features described herein relative to computer **1702**.

[0224] Logical connections between computer **1702** and the remote computer **1748** are depicted as a local area network (LAN) **1750** and a general wide area network (WAN) **1752**. Such networking environments are commonplace in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, intranets, and the Internet.

[0225] When implemented in a LAN networking environment, the computer **1702** is connected to a local network **1750** via a network interface or adapter **1754**. When implemented in a WAN networking environment, the computer **1702** typically includes a modem **1756** or other means for establishing communications over the wide network **1752**. The modem **1756**, which can be internal or external to computer **1702**, can be connected to the system bus **1708** via the input/output interfaces **1740** or other appropriate mechanisms. It is to be appreciated that the illustrated network connections are exemplary and that other means of establishing communication link(s) between the computers **1702** and **1748** can be employed.

[0226] In a networked environment, such as that illustrated with computing environment **1700**, program modules depicted relative to the computer **1702**, or portions thereof, may be stored in a remote memory storage device. By way of example, remote application programs **1758** reside on a memory device of remote computer **1748**. For purposes of illustration, application programs and other executable program components such as the operating system are illustrated herein as discrete blocks, although it is recognized that such programs and components reside at various times in different storage components of the computing-based device **1702**, and are executed by the data processor(s) of the computer.

[0227] Various modules and techniques may be described herein in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, executed by one or more computers or other devices. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that performs particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. Typically, the functionality of the program modules may be combined or distributed as desired in various embodiments.

[0228] An implementation of these modules and techniques may be stored on or transmitted across some form of computer readable media. Computer readable media can be any available media that can be accessed by a computer. By way of example, and not limitation, computer readable media may comprise "computer storage media" and "communications media."

[0229] "Computer storage media" includes volatile and non-volatile, removable and non-removable media implemented in any method or technology for storage of information such as computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules, or other data. Computer storage media includes, but is not limited to, RAM, ROM, EEPROM, flash memory or other memory technology, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices, or any other medium which can be used to store the desired information and which can be accessed by a computer.

[0230] Alternately, portions of the framework may be implemented in hardware or a combination of hardware, software, and/or firmware. For example, one or more application specific integrated circuits (ASICs) or programmable logic devices (PLDs) could be designed or programmed to implement one or more portions of the framework.

CONCLUSION

[0231] Although embodiments of thread interception and analysis have been described in language specific to structural features and/or methods, it is to be understood that the subject of the appended claims is not necessarily limited to the specific features or methods described. Rather, the specific features and methods are disclosed as exemplary implementations of thread interception and analysis.

1. A system, comprising:
at least one processor;
one or more functions operating on the system; and
a thread data recorder configured to instrument the one or more functions, such that the one or more functions: intercept threads calling the one or more functions; and capture data associated with the intercepted threads.

2. A system of claim **1**, wherein the thread data recorder is configured to instrument the one or more functions by modifying computer executable instructions in each of the one or more functions.

3. A system of claim **1**, wherein the thread data recorder is configured to instrument the one or more functions at a start up of the system.

4. A system of claim **1**, wherein the one or more functions include choke point functions.

5. A system of claim **1**, wherein the thread data recorder comprises:
a duplicating module configured to duplicate data associated with the intercepted threads; and
a directing module configured to direct a user daemon to effect compression of the duplicated data.

6. A system of claim **5**, wherein the directing module is further configured to direct the user daemon to effect compression of the duplicated data when at least one of:
resources of the processor are being used at or below a predetermined level;
a predetermined time.

7. A method comprising:

instrumenting an existing function to intercept a thread calling the existing function and capture data associated with the thread; and

copying the captured data associated with the thread

8. A method of claim **7**, her comprising:

accessing data regarding a program issuing the thread; and

accessing a time at which an interaction associated with the thread is performed by the existing function.

9. A method of claim **7**, further comprising:

examining at least a portion of the data associated with the thread for an identifier of a program; and

comparing the identifier of the program against a list of identifiers of known unwarranted programs.

10. A method of claim **9**, wherein comparing comprises removing the program if the identifier of the program matches an identifier of a known unwarranted program.

11. A method of claim **7**, further comprising compressing the data associated with the thread.

12. A method of claim **11**, further comprising periodically uploading the compressed data to an analyzing server

13. One or more computer readable media comprising computer executable instructions that, when executed, perform acts comprising:

receiving one or more related interactions, the one or more related interactions occurring in one or more threads; and

grouping the one or more related interactions into an activity burst.

14. One or more computer readable media as recited in claim **13**, further comprising computer executable instructions that, when executed, perform additional acts comprising:

assigning similar signatures to activity bursts having similar interactions to uniquely identify the activity bursts as being similar

calculating the similar signatures by processes comprising:

hashing file paths; and

hashing identifiers of activity types.

15. One or more computer readable media as recited in claim **13**, her comprising computer executable instructions that, when executed, perform additional acts comprising, assigning a same signature to activity bursts including interactions with temporary files.

16. One or more computer readable media as recited in claim **13**, further comprising computer executable instructions that, when executed, perform additional acts comprising generating a data collection, wherein the data collection includes a listing of one or more activity bursts sorted by respective signatures of the one or more activity bursts.

17. One or more computer readable media as recited in claim **13**, further comprising computer executable instructions that, when executed, perform additional acts comprising prohibiting the execution of an unauthorized interaction.

18. One or more computer readable media as recited in claim **13**, wherein the interactions include:

reading from a memory;

writing to a memory;

changing a setting;

executing an application.

19. One or more computer readable media as recited in claim **13**, wherein grouping comprises grouping related interactions on the basis of at least one of:

a time associated with the interactions;

a user associated with the interactions;

a program associated with the interactions.

20. One or more computer readable media as recited in claim **13**, further comprising computer executable instructions that, when executed, perform additional acts comprising identifying the presence of an unwarranted program by detecting an occurrence of a signature associated with an activity burst corresponding to the unwarranted program.

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