

# Dyninst and MRNet: Foundational Infrastructure for Parallel Tools

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**Abstract** Parallel tools require common pieces of infrastructure: the ability to control, monitor, and instrument programs, and the ability to massively scale these operations as the application program being studied scales. The Paradyn Project has a long history of developing new technologies in these two areas and producing ready-to-use tool kits that embody these technologies: Dyninst, which provides binary program control, instrumentation, and modification, and MRNet, which provides a scalable and extensible infrastructure to simplify the construction of massively parallel tools, middleware and applications. We will discuss new techniques that we have developed in these areas, and present examples of current use of these tool kits in a variety of tool and middleware projects. In addition, we will discuss features in these tool kits that have not yet been fully exploited in parallel tool development, and that could lead to advancements in parallel tools.

## 1 Introduction

Parallel tools require common pieces of infrastructure: the ability to control, monitor, and instrument programs, and the ability to massively scale these operations as the application program being studied scales. The Paradyn Project has a long history of developing new technologies in these two areas and producing ready-to-use tool

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kits that embody these technologies. One of these tool kits is Dyninst, which provides binary program control, instrumentation, and modification. When we initially designed Dyninst, our goal was to provide a platform-independent binary instrumentation platform that captured only the necessary complexities of binary code. We believe that the breadth of tools using Dyninst, and the breadth of Dyninst components that they use, reflects how well we have adhered to these guiding principles. We discuss the structure and features of Dyninst in Section 2.

Another tool kit we have developed is MRNet, which provides a scalable and extensible infrastructure to simplify the construction of massively parallel tools, middleware and applications. MRNet was designed from the beginning to be a flexible and scalable piece of infrastructure for a wide variety of tools. It has been applied to data aggregation, command and control, and even to the implementation of distributed filesystems. MRNet provides the scalability foundation for several critical pieces of debugging software. We discuss the features of MRNet in Section 3.

We discuss common problems in scalable tool development that our tool kits have been used to solve in the domains of performance analysis (Section 4) and debugging (Section 5). These problems include providing control flow context for an address in the binary, providing local variable locations and values that are valid at an address in the binary, collecting execution and stack traces, aggregating trace data, and dynamically instrumenting a binary in response to newly collected information.

We also discuss several usage scenarios of our tool kits in binary analysis (Section 6) and binary modification (Section 7) applications. Analysis applications of our tools (Figure 3 include enhancing debugging information to provide a more accurate mapping of memory and register locations to local variables, improved analysis of indirect branches, and improved detection of function entry points that lack symbol information. Applications of our tools for binary modification include instruction replacement, control flow graph modification, and stack layout modification. Some of these analysis and modification applications have already proven useful in high-performance computing. We conclude (Section 8) with a summary of future plans for development.

## 2 DyninstAPI and Components

DyninstAPI provides an interface for binary instrumentation, modification, and control, operating both on running processes and on binary files (executables and libraries) on disk. Its fundamental abstractions are *points*, specifying where to instrument, and *snippets*, specifying what instrumentation should do. Dyninst provides platform-independent abstractions representing many aspects of processes and binaries, including address spaces, functions, variables, basic blocks, control flow edges, binary files and their component modules.

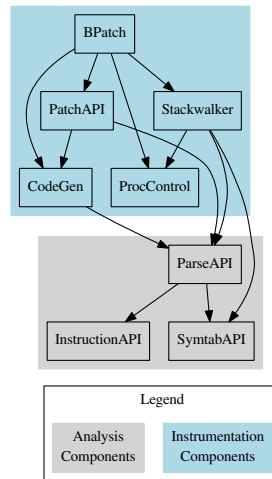
Points are specified in terms of the control flow graph (CFG) of a binary. This provides a natural description of locations that programmers understand, such as

function entry/exit, loop entry/exit, basic block boundaries, call sites, and control flow edges. Previous work, including earlier versions of Dyninst [7], specified instrumentation locations by instruction addresses or by control flow transfers. Bernat and Miller [5] provide a detailed argument why, in general, instrumentation before or after an instruction, or instrumentation on a control transfer, does not accurately capture certain important locations in the program. In particular, it is difficult to characterize points related to functions or loops by using only addresses or control transfers.

Snippets are specified in a platform-independent abstract syntax tree language [7]. The platform-independent nature of the instrumentation specification allows Dyninst-based tools (*mutators*) to, in most cases, be written once and run on any supported platform.

To instrument a binary, extra space must be provided in the code for the instrumentation code. This space may be created by relocating some or all of the original code in order to provide room for instrumentation. The instrumentation and associated program code may be positioned so that the instrumentation executes inline with its program context or out-of-line from its context. Bernat and Miller [5] determined that, given current processor characteristics, relocating whole functions and generating their associated instrumentation inline minimizes overhead by improving instruction cache coherence compared to other approaches.

Dyninst has been deconstructed into several component libraries [24], each performing some aspect of binary instrumentation, analysis, or control (Figure 1. As we will see, many of these components are commonly used in various smaller subsets for common tasks in parallel tool design. As a benefit of creating smaller components, each of these components deals with a much smaller amount of platform



**Fig. 1** Dyninst and its component libraries

**Table 1** Dyninst components and their capabilities

Component	Description	Supported Platforms
SymtabAPI	Reads symbol tables and debugging information	ELF, PE
InstructionAPI	Decodes instructions to an operation and operand ASTs	x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64
ParseAPI	Constructs control flow graphs	x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64
DataflowAPI	Performs data flow analyses: slicing, register liveness, stack analysis, symbolic evaluation	x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64
StackwalkerAPI	Collects call stacks	Linux, Windows, x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64, ARMv8
ProcControlAPI	Provides a platform-independent layer on top of the operating system debug interface	Linux, Windows, x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64, ARMv8
PatchAPI	Provides a point of indirection to represent transformations to a control flow graph	x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64
CodeGen	Generates code for instrumentation snippets and code to ensure those snippets do not interfere with the original program	x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64
DynC	Provides a C-like language for specifying instrumentation snippets	x86, x86_64, PowerPC32, PowerPC64

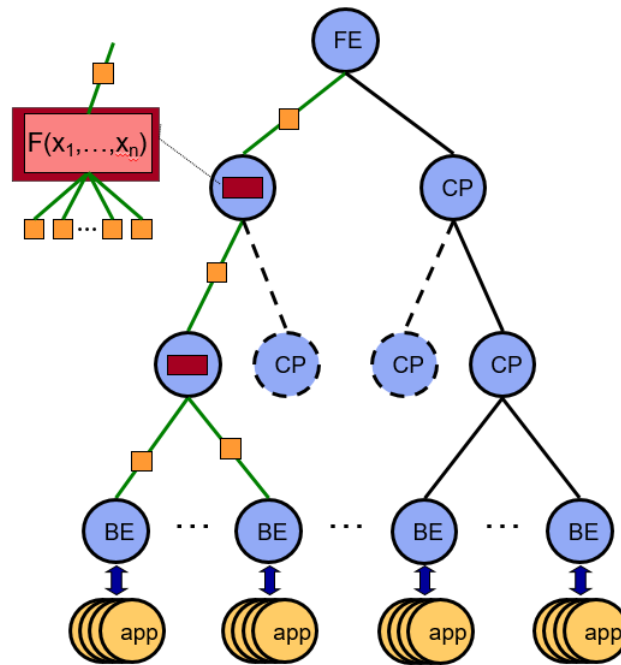
variation than Dyninst. For example, while Dyninst supports a wide variety of architectures and operating systems, the SymtabAPI component is concerned primarily with the details of binary file formats. This allows us to largely simplify SymtabAPI to handling ELF and PE files correctly, with small and well-defined architecture and operating system specific subcomponents. The Dyninst components include tools for analyzing and interpreting binaries, interacting with processes, and modifying binaries and inserting instrumentation. The analysis and interpretation components include SymtabAPI, which provides a format-independent representation of binary files and debugging information; InstructionAPI, which disassembles instructions; ParseAPI, which constructs control flow graphs; and DataflowAPI, which contains a selection of data flow analysis algorithms used inside Dyninst. StackwalkerAPI and ProcControlAPI, respectively, collect stack traces from processes and control processes and threads via the debug interface of the operating system. PatchAPI, CodeGen, DynC, and DyninstAPI itself collectively provide the point-snippet interface used by instrumentation, the interfaces for control flow modification, and a C-like wrapper language to generate snippet construction code. The components and their supported platforms are listed in Table 1.

### 3 MRNet

Scalable computation is an important challenge, whether you are building applications, tools, or large scale distributed systems. The systems resources. The challenge

of scale requires that developers for distributed systems select computational patterns that have the properties that allow for scaling and the expressiveness to apply to a broad range of problems. Tree-based Overlay Networks (TBONs) are an ideal method of parallelizing computation supplying a scalable communication pattern that can express the solution to a wide range of distributed computation problems. TBONs connect a set of processes into a tree layout where leaf nodes perform the bulk processing work, internal tree processes perform aggregation/multicasting of results out of the tree, and a single front end process which aggregates results to produce a single output. Scalability is achieved with TBONs by use of aggregation and multicast filters to reduce data moving through the tree.

The Multicast Reduction Network (MRNet) [26] is a framework that implements the TBON model to provide scalable communication to distributed system developers. MRNet handles the creation and connection of processes into a tree network layout. MRNet assigns each process a role as a *frontend* (FE), *communication* (CP), or *backend* (BE) process, as shown in figure 2. The size of the tree and layout of processes can be modified by users without modifying the program, allowing a single codebase to scale from one process to millions. Users can supply custom aggregation and multicast filters to MRNet. The MRNet framework has been used exten-

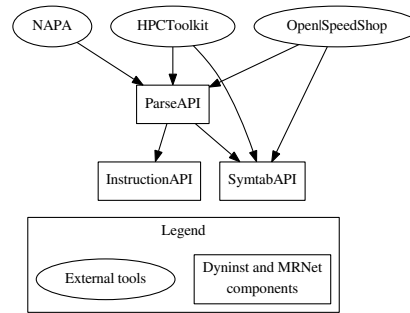


**Fig. 2** The layout of a MRNet tree and its various components.

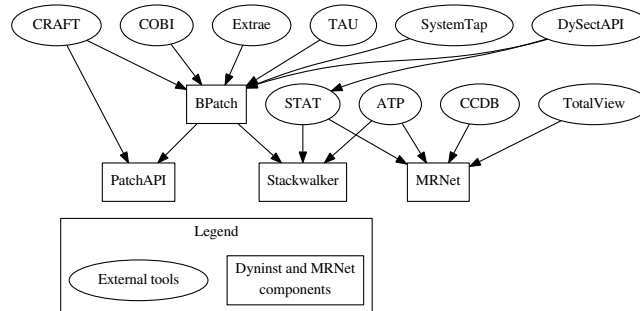
sively to build highly scalable tools and applications that are in use on leadership class machines [28][3][2].

## 4 Performance Tools

Performance tools collect and interpret information about how a program uses various system resources, such as CPU, memory, and networks. There are two notable categories of performance tools where Dyninst components have been used as part of these tasks: sampling tools and tracing tools. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate how performance tools may use Dyninst and its components in both analysis and instrumentation contexts.



**Fig. 3** Tools using Dyninst’s binary analysis components.



**Fig. 4** Tools using Dyninst’s instrumentation, monitoring, and debugging components.

## 4.1 Sampling Tools

Sampling tools periodically observe some aspect of program behavior and record these observations. One common form of sampling is call-stack sampling, which collects a set of program counter (PC) values and return address (RA) values that comprise the call stack of an executing thread. From these addresses in the program's code segment, one may derive a variety of further context:

- Binary file
- Source file
- Function
- Source line
- Loop
- Basic block

HPCToolkit [1] and Open|SpeedShop [29] both use SymtabAPI and ParseAPI to determine this contextual information from the addresses in a call stack. Reconstructing both the full source-level calling context (including inline functions) and the loop nesting context (including irreducible loops) from a call stack provides users with additional insight into where their code suffers from performance problems.

## 4.2 Tracing Tools

Tracing may be performed at function, basic block, memory reference, or instruction granularities. It captures records of events as they occur in the program. Many well-known performance tools collect or analyze tracing data. In particular, COBI [23], Tau [31], and Extrae [20] can use Dyninst's binary rewriting functionality in order to insert instrumentation that produces tracing data.

Instrumentation-based tracing relies on the insertion of instrumentation at the various points where trace data is to be collected. This instrumentation may be inserted as source code, during the compilation and linking process, through modification of the binary once it has been linked, or at run time. Instrumentation that occurs at any point up to and including the linking process we describe as source instrumentation; instrumentation that occurs afterward we describe as binary instrumentation. Dyninst and its components are concerned with binary instrumentation.

Binary instrumentation relies on the ability to understand and manipulate binary code without access to authoritative source code or compiler intermediate representations. It is necessarily a more difficult process than source instrumentation, but comes with compensating advantages. First, if a user wishes to dynamically modify the set of events that they are recording based on the data they have collected, it is necessary to insert or remove instrumentation at run time. In the subset of cases where the user already knows what instrumentation they would wish to insert prior to run time, this capability can be emulated at the source level by selectively enabling and disabling instrumentation execution, but binary instrumentation allows arbitrary instrumentation to be inserted at arbitrary points in response to observed

events. Second, binary instrumentation can be inserted without recompiling a program. Particularly in cases where a user wishes to instrument a small portion of a large application, this can provide a significant time savings. Third, while source instrumenters have been improving their ability to avoid perturbing the resulting binary, they are not perfect in this respect. Binary instrumentation, of course, also perturbs the resulting binary, but its starting ground truth is precisely the binary that the compiler would generate without instrumentation.

In addition to tracing control flow events, the Dyninst interface allows users to perform tracing of a wide variety of memory operations: tracking allocations and deallocations, instrumenting memory accesses, and observing the effective addresses and byte counts they affect. As with all forms of fine-grained (instruction level) instrumentation, the overhead imposed by observing and recording every memory access is quite high in most cases. It is consequently common in our experience for users to develop specialized tools for memory tracing to diagnose particular performance problems. We hope that broader exposure of the Dyninst memory instrumentation features will lead to more general-purpose memory instrumentation tools being developed, both for performance analysis and for debugging.

## 5 Debugging Tools

In addition to analyzing the performance of parallel software, it is often necessary to debug it. The combination of certain Dyninst components with MRNet has proven to be a potent combination for developing lightweight tools for identifying bugs at extremely large scales.

### 5.1 Stack Trace Aggregation

A basic and useful approach to developing highly scalable debugging tools is stack trace aggregation: collecting stack traces from all of the threads and processes in a large parallel program, and merging them into a call stack prefix tree. Examples of this approach include Stack Trace Analysis Tool (STAT) [3] from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories (LLNL) and Cray's Abnormal Termination Processing (ATP) tool [9]. Each of these tools uses StackwalkerAPI to collect call stacks. Users of the tools may collect local variable information and function contexts, as in Section 4.1, using SyntabAPI and potentially also ParseAPI. MRNet is then used by these tools to aggregate the stack traces in a scalable manner into a call stack prefix tree. STAT and ATP differ in their intended use cases; STAT is often used to debug hangs and stalls, whereas ATP is specifically focused on debugging crashes.

STAT has been successfully used to detect a wide variety of problems in both software and hardware. It has detected bugs in the LUSTRE filesystem, slow decrementors on particular processor cores resulting in 1,000,000x slowdowns in



`sleep()`, and numerous bugs in application code as well [17]. STAT has collected call stacks from the entire Sequoia supercomputer (approximately 750,000 cores), and has collected call stacks from approximately 200k cores in under a second [19]. ATP is a standard part of Cray’s Linux distribution [9], and is automatically invoked whenever an appropriately launched application crashes.

## 5.2 *Distributed Debuggers with MRNet*

MRNet has also been used as infrastructure for providing scalable control of existing full-featured debugging tools. The TotalView debugger has employed MRNet as a distributed process control layer [22], as has Cray’s CCDB debugger.

TotalView is a high performance parallel debugger developed by Roguewave capable of debugging and profiling applications running on large node counts. With Totalview, application developers can perform wide range of debugging and profiling tasks such as setting breakpoints, reading and writing memory locations and registers, and single stepping through an application. MRNet is used by Totalview to scale these operations across an application running on thousands of nodes. A tree based overlay network is constructed between the application processes running on nodes and a frontend process that controls debugging and profiling operations. The frontend presents a user with a graphical representation of the current state of a running distributed application. A user can then issue commands (such as setting a breakpoint) that are passed through the overlay network down to application processes where they are executed. TotalView uses aggregation filters to reduce the volume of data generated by application processes so that a snapshot of the current state of a running application can be presented to the developer. Multicast filters are used by TotalView to broadcast commands down to individual nodes.

The Scalable Parallel Debugging Library [16] (SPDL), which provides a generic parallel debugging interface on top of MRNet and Eclipse SCI [8], has been used to extend Cray’s CCDB debugger to larger scales [10]. SPDL provides comparable infrastructure to the TotalView implementation described above. CCDB, using this infrastructure, demonstrates command latency of less than a second at scales up to 32,000 processes.

## 5.3 *Dynamic Instrumentation for Debugging*

For some debugging problems, stack traces are insufficient, and the programmer requires knowledge of how the current point of execution was reached. This is an area where dynamic instrumentation can be applied in at least two ways: as a method for generating automated equivalents of typical interactive debugging commands, and as a method for generating debugging traces that precisely capture interesting behavior. We consider an example of each of these applications.

DySectAPI [15] builds on the foundation of STAT, and attempts to provide the ability to script `gdb`-like query and process control operations: breakpoints, probe points, conditional breakpoints and watchpoints, and access to registers and variables. Much of this functionality can be exposed with only trivial extensions to STAT (for instance, allowing the user to write to local variables as well as reading them); some, however, requires significantly more of the Dyninst component stack. In particular, the execution of an arbitrary remote procedure call requires some form of code generation.

SystemTap [12] is a kernel instrumentation and tracing tool developed by RedHat that uses Dyninst instrumentation to extend its capabilities to user space. The current SystemTap model is mostly oriented towards instrumentation specified statically, as it must support the compilation of scripts to kernel modules. For those cases where it is performing instrumentation that appears to be dynamic, that appearance is in most cases granted through conditional execution. SystemTap does allow scripts to invoke arbitrary system commands; we believe that special handling of the recursive invocation of SystemTap itself through dynamic instrumentation would increase the power of this idiom.

## 6 Analysis Tools

Improving the understanding of a binary's behavior can allow other tools to perform their tasks better. We present a data flow analysis use case, where slicing is used to improve the understanding of local variable access, and a control flow analysis use case, where accurate understanding of the CFG of a binary allows more efficient and accurate instrumentation within Dyninst itself.

### 6.1 Slicing

Slicing [33] is a data flow analysis that determines which instructions affect (backwards slicing) or are affected by (forwards slicing) the value of a given abstract location (register or memory location) at a given instruction. The DataflowAPI includes a slicing implementation that refines this concept to consider not just instructions, but assignments within those instructions.

The NAPA tool, currently under development at LLNL, uses DataflowAPI's slicer in an effort to improve the ability of tools to match individual load and store instructions with their corresponding variables. In principle, debugging information such as DWARF [11] should contain sufficient information that all such memory accesses can be resolved. In practice, for many data structures, this is not the case. For example, while the debugging information may contain one of the ways to refer to a location within an aggregate, the actual load or store will use a different alias to the same location. Applying a backwards slicing analysis to the load or store,

searching through the containing function until the effective address being accessed has been derived from some set of local variables, improves the input data to further analyses, such as blame assignment [27].

## 6.2 Binary Parsing

The goal of parsing a binary is to represent the binary with code constructs that are familiar to programmers, including CFGs, functions, loops and basic blocks. These code constructs are the foundations for performing a data flow analysis, such as slicing (Section 6.1), and specifying instrumentation points, such as instrumenting at the entry of a function or at the exit of a loop.

Algorithms to recover these code constructs from binaries are encapsulated in ParseAPI. ParseAPI uses recursive traversal parsing [30] to construct basic blocks, determine function boundaries, and build CFGs. It starts from known entry points such as the program entry point and function entry points from symbol tables and follows the control flow transfers to build the CFG and identify more entry points. Not all code will necessarily be found by recursive traversal alone; this leaves *gaps* [14] in the binary where code may be present, but has not yet been identified. Furthermore, recursive traversal does not explicitly address the problem of how to resolve control flow targets in non-trivial cases, such as indirect branches. If these challenges are not handled properly, the parser would miss real code, have inaccurate CFGs, and observe degrading qualities of data flow analysis, binary instrumentation, and binary modification. We describe our new techniques for resolving jump tables, which represent a well-defined subset of indirect branches, and for gap parsing, which improves our parsing coverage for stripped binaries.

Jump tables are commonly used to implement switch statements and loop unrolling optimizations and they often represent intraprocedural control transfers. Because of Dyninst’s function-based relocation approach (Section 2), it is necessary to safely overapproximate the potential targets of an indirect branch to relocate a function. This means that we must ensure that our understanding of a function’s structure does not miss any code, and our understanding of its basic blocks does not ignore any block boundaries. In practical terms, this means that our analysis of an indirect branch must contain a proper superset of the true targets of that branch, or we will be unable to safely relocate and instrument the function containing the indirect branch.

We implemented a new slicing-based data flow analysis [21] to improve our handling of jump tables, relying on the following two key characterizations of jump tables: (1) jump table entries are contiguous and reside in read-only memory regions; (2) the jump target depends on a single bounded input value, which often corresponds to the switch variable in a switch statement. Our analysis is able to handle several variations of jump tables that appear in real software: (1) the table contents can be either jump target addresses or offsets relative to a base address; (2) the table location can be either explicitly encoded in instructions or computed;

(3) the input value can be bounded through conditional jumps or computation; (4) arbitrary levels of tables involved in address calculation, where prior level tables are used to index into later level tables.

Our evaluations show that the new analysis can reduce the number of uninstrumentable functions in glibc by 30% with a 20% increase in parse overhead and reduce 7% uninstrumentable functions in normal binaries with a 5% increase in parse overhead.

Stripped binaries are significantly more difficult to analyze because when no function entry points are present, it is not easy to decide which addresses to start the control flow traversal. Recent research has used machine learning based approaches to learn code features such as instruction sequences [25, 4] or raw byte sequences [32] for identifying function entry points. Dyninst 9.0 uses Rosenblum et al’s approach [25] to select instruction sequences from a set of training binaries and assigns each selected instruction sequence a weight to represent the probability that an address is a function entry point if the sequence is matched at the address. We scan through the binary searching for addresses where the probability that the address is a function entry point is greater than a configurable threshold. For each address where this is true, we then apply Dyninst’s recursive traversal implementation, analyzing the function implied by this entry point and all of its callees to reduce the size of the gaps that must be scanned. Note that if we have identified a function entry point with some probability  $p$ , every one of its call targets must be a function entry point with probability  $q \geq p$ . Thus, all of the function entry points generated by this approach will be true function entry points with  $p \geq t$  for a threshold  $t$ .

**Table 2** Gap parsing test results

Version	Platform	Average Precision	Average Recall
Manually-designed patterns (8.2.1)	64-bit x86	98.1%	37.4%
Manually-designed patterns (8.2.1)	32-bit x86	95.6%	53.9%
Machine learning-derived idioms (9.0)	64-bit x86	94.7%	83.2%
Machine learning-derived idioms (9.0)	32-bit x86	97.1%	93.8%

We compared the abilities of two versions of Dyninst to identify function entry points in stripped binaries. Dyninst 8.2.1 uses a few manually-designed instruction patterns and Dyninst 9.0 uses the machine learning approach to train its model. The test binaries are from binutils, coreutils, and findutils, built with ICC and GCC, at -O0 to -O3. The test results are summarized in Table 2. *Precision*, in this case, is the percentage of function entry points identified by Dyninst that are real function entry points; *recall* is the percentage of real function entry points identified as such.

We make two observations about these results. First, we see that the machine learning approach dramatically increases the recall in both 32-bit and 64-bit binaries, at the cost of some precision. This means that ParseAPI can discover much more code in gaps, with some of the discovered code being not real code. Second, the results show that 64-bit function entry points are more difficult to identify. Our examination of the rules generated for Dyninst 9.0 suggests that the increased size

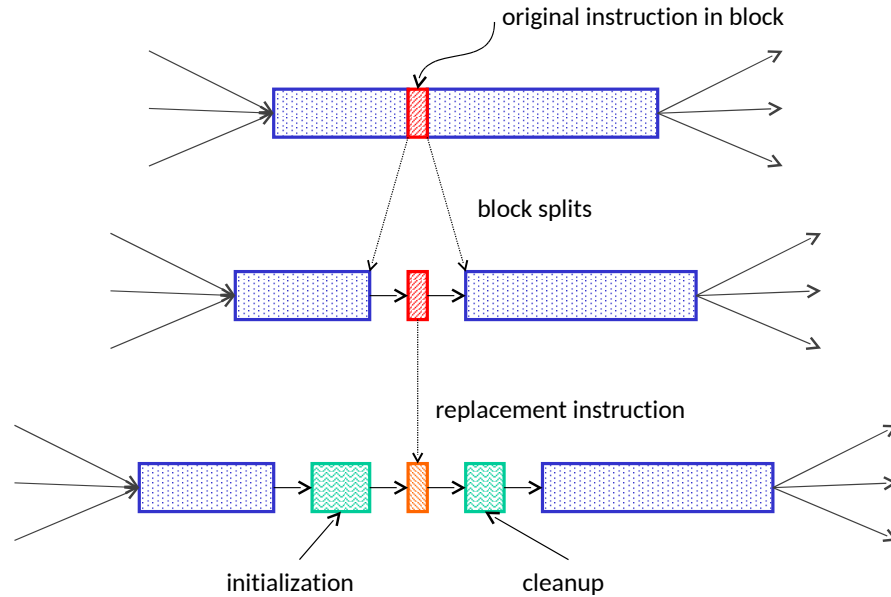
of the register set and the consequent decreased need to use the stack for parameter passing and temporary space are largely responsible for this increased difficulty.

## 7 Modification Tools

In addition to performing instrumentation, where the behavior of the original binary is not changed, Dyninst and its components allow modification of the binary. This modification can occur at the instruction level, at the CFG level, or even at the level of data layout on the stack. We present an example of each of these use cases.

CRAFT [18] is a tool that determines which double-precision values in a binary can best be replaced by single-precision, attempting to obtain the maximum performance benefit while ensuring that output accuracy remains within a user-specified tolerance. To do this, it replaces each double-precision instruction with a code sequence that performs the same operation in parallel in single and double precision, and then tracks the error introduced by conversion to single precision. Figure 5 illustrates this operation.

Bernat and Miller [6] demonstrated the use of Dyninst components to apply security patches at the binary level to a running process by matching a CFG fingerprint,



**Fig. 5** Replacing instructions in basic blocks with CRAFT [18].

constructing the code added by the patch in snippet form, and modifying the control flow of the binary appropriately. This application, unlike CRAFT, typically works by replacing blocks and edges as an entire subgraph of the CFG; Bernat and Miller’s example patches the Apache HTTP server by wrapping a function call in an appropriate error checking and handling conditional. This CFG-based approach to binary modification does not rely on symbols or particular instruction patterns. This allows it to properly apply patches across binaries generated by a wide range of compilers, and to be robust against inlining of the location to be patched.

Gember-Jacobson and Miller [13] implemented primitives within Dyninst that allow the modification of functions’ stack frames in well-specified manners: insertion and removal of space, and exchanging two local variables within the same contiguous stack region. This work does not alter the control flow of the binary at all; its purpose is solely to affect the data layout of the stack. In addition to the modifications that can be expressed purely in terms of insertion, removal, and exchange, they provide implementations for inserting stack canaries into functions and randomizing the order of local variables on the stack. Unlike the previous two examples, which altered the control flow graph of the program, this work modifies the data flow graph of the program while holding control flow constant.

## 8 Future Work

Dyninst and MRNet have become projects with a broad base of contributors and ongoing development. As we deconstructed Dyninst into smaller tool kits, we refined which complexities are actually necessary, and refined our abstractions to better match what users need. In particular, the deconstruction of Dyninst has shown us that Dyninst components may be used in a far broader set of applications than we initially expected.

In Dyninst, we plan to add full support for ARM64/Linux, add support for 64-bit Windows, and add support for Windows binary rewriting in the near term. We are also continually working to support new high-performance computing environments. In MRNet, we plan to implement a zero-copy interface that will improve performance.

Both Dyninst and MRNet are available via anonymous git checkout from <http://git.dyninst.org>. The Dyninst mailing list is [dyninst-api@cs.wisc.edu](mailto:dyninst-api@cs.wisc.edu). The MRNet mailing list is [mrnet@cs.wisc.edu](mailto:mrnet@cs.wisc.edu). Contributions, questions, and feature requests are always welcome.

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