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(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR INTERCOMMUNICATIONS AMONGST DEVICE DRIVERS

(57) Abstract: Techniques for intercommunication amongst device drivers are described herein. In one embodiment, an application programming interface (API) is provided by a kernel of an operating system (OS) running within a data processing system. The API is accessible by device drivers associated with multiple devices installed in the system. In response to a request from a first instance of a driver via the API, information indicating whether another instance of the same driver is currently started is returned via the API. Other methods and apparatuses are also described.

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR INTERCOMMUNICATIONS AMONGST
DEVICE DRIVERS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to data processing systems. More particularly, this invention relates to intercommunications amongst multiple device drivers in a data processing system.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Data processing systems, such as, computer systems, are composed of a variety of different components or "devices" that operate together to form the resultant system. Typically, some of the devices are supplied with the computer system initially, such as a central processing unit and a communication bus, and some devices can be installed into the computer system after the initial configuration of the system. In any event, in the general case, each device has an associated driver that, among other functions, configures the device and allows the device to be operable within the overall system. Drivers are typically software instructions that can be loaded into the computer system's memory and when executed will communicate with the device to properly configure the device for operation. The driver may initialize the device so that the device can function and the driver may also allow the device to communicate normally within the overall system.

[0003] In certain system configurations, a device driver may support multiple devices. During the initialization of a computer system, the system may enumerate the devices installed within the system. As a result, multiple instances of a driver may be loaded to support multiple devices. In order to avoid loading multiple instances of the same driver, in the past, a driver developer had to know how to determine whether another instance of the same driver is loaded. For example, when an instance of a driver is initialized, the driver has to acquire a lock to a device dictionary maintained by a kernel of an operating system to prevent others from accessing the same. Once the driver acquires the lock, the

driver accesses the dictionary to determine whether another instance of the device driver has already registered its driver handle. If not, the current instance of driver registers with the dictionary by inserting its driver handle. If there is a previous driver registered with the dictionary, the current instance of the driver may unload itself. Thus, this is a first-come-first-serve situation where multiple instances of the same driver race to acquire the lock and register with the dictionary. In addition, a driver has to maintain the dictionary. Such a mechanism is relatively complicated and inconvenient, and an author of a device driver must write this software each time they write a driver.

[0004] Further, in certain situations, a driver may have to invoke another driver to perform certain functionalities that the driver is not capable of doing so. In the past, one driver has to call another driver via a communication protocol, such as, those described in IEEE 1275 firmware standard ("IEEE Standard for Boot (Initialization Configuration) Firmware: Core Requirements and Practices" IEEE Std 1275-1994, Oct. 28, 1994, pp. 1-262), which requires a driver developer to fully understand such a protocol and the system software has to fully support it.

SUMMARY OF THE DESCRIPTION

[0005] Techniques for intercommunication amongst device drivers are described herein. In one embodiment, an application programming interface (API) is provided and accessible by device drivers of a data processing system. In one embodiment, such an API is provided by a kernel of an operating system (OS) running within a data processing system. The API is accessible by device drivers associated with multiple devices installed in the system. During an initialization period of an instance of a driver, the instance of the driver invokes the API to determine whether there is another instance of driver that has been initialized. In response to a request from a first instance of a driver via the API, information indicating whether another instance of the same driver is currently started is returned via the API.

[0006] Other features of the present invention will be apparent from the accompanying drawings and from the detailed description which follows.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] The present invention is illustrated by way of example and not limitation in the figures of the accompanying drawings in which like references indicate similar elements.

[0008] Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating a system configuration according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0009] Figure 2 illustrates a logical representation of a simplified device tree database according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0010] Figure 3A is a block diagram illustrating a data structure representing a device tree according to one embodiment.

[0011] Figure 3B is diagram illustrating an example of a dictionary according to one embodiment.

[0012] Figure 4A is a block diagram illustrating a system configuration according to one embodiment.

[0013] Figure 4B is a flow diagram illustrating a process for managing device drivers according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0014] Figure 5A illustrates an example of a device tree, device tree plane, and/or a service plane according to one embodiment.

[0015] Figure 5B is a diagram illustrating a data structure representing device 500 of Figure 5A.

[0016] Figure 6A is a flow diagram illustrating a process performed by an instance of a driver according to one embodiment.

[0017] Figure 6B is a flow diagram illustrating a process of an API of a kernel according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0018] Figures 7A-7D illustrate pseudo codes of certain routines according to certain embodiments of the invention.

[0019] Figure 8 is a diagram illustrating an example of a device tree where a device node encodes information regarding another device node, according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0020] Figure 9 is a diagram illustrating a particular example of having information encoded within a device node to allow the device node to invoke a driver of another device node, according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0021] Figure 10 is a flow diagram illustrating a process that enables a driver to communicate with another driver using a device tree according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0022] Figure 11 is a block diagram of a digital processing system, which may be used with one embodiment of the invention.

[0023] Figure 12 is a block diagram of a digital processing system, which may be used with another embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0024] In the following description, numerous details are set forth to provide a more thorough explanation of embodiments of the present invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that embodiments of the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known structures and devices are shown in block diagram form, rather than in detail, in order to avoid obscuring embodiments of the present invention.

[0025] Reference in the specification to “one embodiment” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the invention. The appearances of the phrase “in one embodiment” in various places in the specification do not necessarily all refer to the same embodiment.

[0026] Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating a system configuration according to one embodiment of the invention. Figure 1 illustrates a simplified diagram of the interaction between a client process and an operating system having an I/O system that uses device drivers for processing I/O requests. This

diagram is representative, for example, of Mac OS from Apple Computer or Windows operating system from Microsoft Corporation. The diagram of Figure 1 may also represent any operating system which uses device drivers for processing I/O requests.

[0027] Referring to Figure 1, according to one embodiment, system configuration 100 includes an operating system environment having a user space 101 (also referred to as user mode) and a kernel space 102 (also referred to as kernel mode) to allow certain software components to communicate with certain hardware components (e.g., devices) installed in hardware space 103. For example, client process 104 makes use of operating system services 105 to perform I/O requests. This is typically achieved by client process 104 making a call to an application program interface (API) function provided by the operating system. Calling the appropriate API function ultimately results in a call to operating system services 105.

[0028] Client process 104 is illustrated as operating in "user" mode and the operating system surfaces are illustrated as operating in "kernel" mode. Modern operating systems typically provide a robust environment for various application programs and intuitive user interfaces. Such operating systems normally have different operating levels or "modes," depending on the level of sophistication of the operating system and the security features that are implemented by the operating system. Normal application programs typically run at the lowest priority and have a full complement of security devices in place to prohibit interference with other applications, or with other layers of the operating system.

[0029] Hardware and other services provided by the operating system are accessed through controlled interfaces or mechanisms which limit the ability of a user application or other process in the user mode to "crash" the system. This lowest priority mode is typically referred to as a user mode and is the mode that most computer users are familiar with. Because of the close integration of drivers with their associated hardware and because of the time critical nature of the tasks that many drivers perform, drivers typically run in an operating system mode that has a much higher priority and a much lower security protection. This mode is

generally referred to as a “kernel” mode. Placing the drivers and other operating system services in the kernel mode allows the operating system to run at a higher priority and perform many functions that would not be possible from user mode.

[0030] Referring back to Figure 1, when client process 104 makes a call to OS services 105, the call is routed to one of the device drivers 108-109 via Device Manager 106 (also referred to as an I/O manager). In addition, device manager 106 maintains a device information base 107. Device information base 107 is used to store any information regarding device drivers 108-109 and the associated devices 110-111. For example, device information base 107 may include a data structure, such as, for example, a device tree having multiple nodes in a hierarchical structure, where each node represents a device (e.g., devices 110-111) installed within the system 100. Each node may be associated with a device driver (e.g., device drivers 108-109) that supports the associated device.

[0031] In one embodiment, the information stored in device information base 107 may be initially stored in a storage, such as, for example, ROM, of the system 100. When system 100 is initialized (e.g., boot), the information is read from the storage to construct a data structure loaded in a memory (e.g., main memory or RAM), also referred to as a device tree plane. In addition, during the initialization, each node of the data structure is processed to identify a proper device driver to be associated with the respective node. The data structure having each node matched with a proper device driver is referred to as a service plane. Note that throughout this application, a device tree is used as an example of a data structure for storing relationship amongst the devices installed in the system. However, it is not so limited; other types of data structures may also be utilized.

[0032] Figure 2 illustrates a logical representation of a simplified device tree database according to one embodiment of the invention. This device tree 200 is a database stored in computer memory as is a hierarchical tree composed of device nodes such as nodes 201-211. This device tree 200 is constructed during the initialization of the system 100 of Figure 1 (e.g., during "boot") and may be

altered thereafter. A number of different procedures can be used within the present invention to generate a listing of devices coupled within the computer system 100. One such procedure is the IEEE 1275 firmware procedure that is used by one embodiment of the present invention.

[0033] The device tree 200 begins as a single root node 201 that may represent the CPU's memory bus. All I/O buses and attached devices are assumed to descend from this single root or "node" 201. Layers descending the device tree 200 are dependent on the operation of devices associated with nodes above them. Buses are parent nodes and devices for the leaf nodes of the device tree 200. A complete device tree 200 represents the device topology of the computer system. A bus node in the device tree represents an I/O address space. Each device on a bus operates within the address space supported by its parent bus. Buses also contain information regarding interrupts, so that a device can request service from a driver. It is appreciated that drivers of embodiments of the present invention are matched to devices, but not to buses. In the device tree 200, buses can lead to other buses. A node of the device tree 200 that corresponds to a device is called a "device node." Devices added to the computer system will be added to the device tree 200 upon initialization of the computer system.

[0034] Embodiments of the invention use information described above in a service plane which is essentially a copy of pertinent information obtained from the device tree 200 with an associated driver associated with each device.

[0035] Referring to Figure 2, an exemplary device tree 200 may be generated by firmware upon the initialization of the computer system 100 of Figure 1. While a portion of the information contained in the device tree 200 is utilized by the embodiments of the invention, the actual (complete) copy of the device tree 200 as generated by the firmware needs to be used. At system initialization, devices communicate their presence to firmware which cooperates with the operating system to construct the device tree 200 (also referred to as a device tree plane). Information of the device tree 200 used by the present invention can be constructed under the IEEE 1275 standard which is well known in the art and is not described herein. The device tree 200 can be modified by the computer

system's operating system from time to time as required or instructed. Note that device tree 200 is shown for the purposes of illustration only. Other formats or architectures may also be utilized.

[0036] Figure 3A is a block diagram illustrating a data structure representing a device tree according to one embodiment. For example, data structure 300 may be used to represent device tree 200 of Figure 2. Referring to Figure 3A, data structure 300 includes multiple fields or attributes to represent each of the devices installed in the system such as, for example, each device node as shown in Figure 2. Data structure 300 includes a root device 301 which may represent device 201 of Figure 2. As described above, a root device may represent a CPU, a chipset, or both of a computer system. In addition, data structure 300 includes multiple child devices 302-303 and 306-307 under the root device 301. For example, child devices 302-303 may represent some of device nodes 204-207 of Figure 2, while child devices 306-307 may represent some of device nodes 208-211 of Figure 2.

[0037] Each device includes a device name for identifying a corresponding device in a device name space and one or more properties specifying information associated with the respective device. For example, device 302 includes a device name 304 and a property attribute having a property field 305 having one or more properties. Each property is identified by a property name (e.g., property names 308-309) and property data (e.g., data fields 310-311), similar to a key-value pair configuration.

[0038] Data structure 300 may be presented to the operating system and drivers by associated descriptive pieces of data (e.g., properties) that are within each node. A device name may be used as a primary basis for matching a driver to a device. A name property may be implemented as a null-terminated string of characters or alternatively, by a UUID (universally unique identifier) or GUID (global unique identifier). Device nodes may also contain a property that indicates compatible devices (not shown) to the corresponding device name.

[0039] Referring to Figure 3A, root device 301 may further include an optional dictionary 312 for storing relationship between a device and a handle of

the associated device driver. An example of a dictionary is shown in Figure 3B. Alternatively, dictionary 312 may be implemented as a separate data structure or table accessible by the root device 301. Further, each device such as device 302 may further include an optional driver field 313 to store a handle of a corresponding driver supporting the respective device. Alternatively, the driver handle 313 may be specified via dictionary 312 as shown in Figure 3B. Note that the data structure 300 is shown for the purposes of illustration only. Other formats or architectures may also be utilized.

[0040] Figure 3B is a block diagram illustrating a data structure representing an example of a dictionary, such as, for example, dictionary 312 of Figure 3A. In one embodiment, dictionary 350 includes multiple entries, each corresponding to a unique device installed in the system supported by a unique driver. In one embodiment, each entry includes a first field 351 to store a device identifier and a second field 352 to store a driver identifier of a device driver supporting the device identified by the first field 351. A device identifier may be a device name or UUID/GUID. A driver identifier may be a handle of a device driver, also referred to as a pointer pointing to a memory location of a device driver currently loaded in memory (e.g., an entry point of the driver loaded in certain areas of the main memory).

[0041] According to one embodiment, dictionary 350 may be constructed during initialization of a computer system or operating system. In a particular embodiment, when the system is initialized (e.g., boot), a device tree stored in a storage (e.g., ROM) is fetched to form a device tree plane. For each device identified in the device tree plane, the identified device is checked against each entry of the dictionary. An identifier of the device (e.g., device name or UUID/GUID) may be inserted into the first field 351. In addition, a matched device driver is identified loaded and its driver handle is inserted into the second field 352. Note that the data structure 350 is shown for the purposes of illustration only. Other formats or architectures may also be utilized.

[0042] According to one embodiment, root device 301 may maintain an API to allow any of the child devices to inquire whether there is another driver or

another instance of a driver supporting the same device. As described above, certain devices may be supported by the same driver. However, under certain circumstances, only one instance of the same driver is allowed to load. In one embodiment, when a first instance of a device driver is initialized in preparing to be loaded, the first instance of the driver calls the API, in this example, the root device, to determine whether a second instance of the same driver has already been loaded.

[0043] In response, a function providing the API performs a lookup operation into the dictionary to determine whether a second instance of the same driver has been loaded. In one embodiment such a function may be part of a kernel function. Alternatively, such a functionality may be provided by a dedicated component of an operating system. For example, the kernel may look up based on a device name provided by the first instance and based on the device name, to determine whether a driver handle exist in the corresponding second field 352. If the corresponding second field 352 is empty, it means that no driver has been loaded for this device. The kernel may insert the driver handle of the first instance into the corresponding second field 352 indicating the first instance of driver has been loaded. Otherwise, according to one embodiment, the kernel may return a driver handle from the corresponding second field 352 indicating another instance of the same driver has been loaded. Based on a result of calling the API, the first instance driver may act properly, such as, for example, unload itself. Other configurations may exist.

[0044] Figure 4A is a block diagram illustrating a system configuration according to one embodiment of the invention. For example, system 400 may be implemented as part of system 100 of Figure 1. Referring to Figure 4A, system 400 includes a driver coordinator 401 communicating with one or more drivers or instances of drivers 403-404 via an API 402. For example, driver coordinator 401 may be a root device of a device tree, such as, for example, root device 201 of device tree 200 as shown in Figure 2. Alternatively, driver coordinator 401 may be a kernel component of an operating system, such as, for example, an IO manager or a device manager. In one embodiment, driver coordinator 401

maintains an API 402 to allow any of the drivers or instances of drivers 403-404 to determine whether there is another related driver.

[0045] For example, for illustration purposes only, a first instance 403 of a driver may invoke API 402 to communicate with component 401 in an attempt to determine whether there is another instance of the same driver existing or already started. When instance 403 calls the API 402, it passes its device identifier (e.g., device name or UUID/GUID associated with the device) to the driver coordinator 401. In one embodiment, the first instance 403 may retrieve its device identifier from a corresponding device node of device tree 405 which may be implemented in a data structure representing at least a portion of a device tree such as device tree 200 of Figure 2. In response to the calling of the API 402, driver coordinator 401 may perform a lookup operation into data structure 405 to determine whether another instance of the same driver has been loaded or started. If there is another instance of a driver has been started, driver coordinator 401 may return a driver identifier (e.g., driver handle) of the existing driver to the caller. Otherwise, driver coordinator 401 may insert caller's driver identifier into the data structure 405.

[0046] According to certain embodiments of the invention, API 402 may also be used by drivers or instances of drivers 403-404 to communicate with each other, based on information stored within a device tree (e.g., data structure 405). For example, one driver or driver instance may communicate with another driver or driver instance based on the information stored within a device tree or data structure.

[0047] Figure 4B is a flow diagram illustrating a process for managing device drivers according to one embodiment of the invention. Note that process 450 may be performed by processing logic which may include software, hardware, or a combination of both. For example, process 450 may be performed by a kernel (e.g., IO manager or device manager) of an operating system of a data processing system such as system 100 of Figure 1 or system 400 of Figure 4A.

[0048] Referring to Figure 4B, at block 451, data representing a device tree is retrieved from a storage, such as, for example ROM (read-only memory) of a

data processing system. The device tree includes multiple device nodes and each node represents a device installed in the system. The data may be retrieved by a kernel component of an operating system, such as, for example, IO manager or device manager. The data may be retrieved via IEEE 1275 protocol. Note that the retrieved data may not necessarily in a tree style structure. Other configurations may also be utilized.

[0049] In response to the data representing a device tree, at block 452, the kernel forms a device tree plane based on the data retrieved from the storage and loads the device tree plane in memory (e.g., main memory or RAM). At block 453, the kernel creates a dictionary or data structure having entries, each entry corresponding to a device. Each entry includes a first field to store an identifier of a device (e.g., device name or UUID/GUID) and a second field to store an identifier of a driver (e.g., driver handle or pointer) associated with the device. At block 454, the kernel maintains an API to allow an instance of a driver to call in order to determine whether another instance of the driver has been loaded or started, based on information obtained from the device tree plane and/or dictionary. At block 455, the kernel also provides a mechanism based on the device tree plane and/or dictionary to allow a driver to communicate (e.g., invocation) with another driver at runtime. Other operations may also be performed.

[0050] Figures 5A-5C are diagrams illustrating an example of a system configuration according to one embodiment. Note that Figures 5A-5C are shown and described for illustration purposes only. Figure 5A illustrates an example of a device tree, device tree plane, and/or a service plane according to one embodiment. Referring to Figure 5A, device tree 500 includes a root device 501 having multiple child devices, such as, for example, SOC (system on a chip) device 502. Device 502 also includes multiple child devices, such as, for example, I2S (integrated interchip sound) device or controller 504 and I2C (integrated circuit) device or controller 503. The I2S controller 504 has one or more child devices, such as, for example, an audio control device 506. The I2C

controller 503 has one or more child devices, such as, for example, an audio data device 505.

[0051] In this example, audio control device 505 is responsible for handling audio control signals while audio data device 506 is responsible for handling audio data signals. Although audio control device 505 and audio data device 506 are considered as two devices; they may be supported or serviced by the same audio driver 507. Figure 5B is a diagram illustrating a data structure representing device 500 of Figure 5A. As shown in Figure 5B, both audio control device 505 and audio data device 506 have a name property (e.g., properties 507-508) of "Audio0" to indicate they are associated with the same device driver. Figure 5C is a block diagram illustrating the corresponding dictionary maintained by the kernel. As shown in Figure 5C, there is only one entry corresponding to the name of "Audio0".

[0052] During initialization of the system, for the illustration purposes, as the kernel of an operating system "walks" through the device tree 500, a driver or an instance of a driver associated each device node is launched and initialized. For example, when audio control device 505 is initialized, a first instance of audio driver 507 associated with audio control device 505 is launched. The first instance may invoke the API (e.g., FindCo-provider) provided by the kernel to determine whether there is another instance of the same driver, in this example, a second instance of driver 507 associated with audio data device 506. In this example, if the second instance of the audio driver has already been launched, the corresponding entry of the dictionary as shown in Figure 5C should have already included a driver handle of the second instance. As a result, the invocation of the API may return the driver handle of the second instance.

[0053] On the other hand, if there is no existing driver instance registered with the dictionary, the kernel may insert the driver handle of the first instance into the corresponding entry of the dictionary. Based on the result of the invocation of the API, the first instance can decide whether the respective instance should continue to start. In one embodiment, when the first instance of the audio driver determines that, based on calling the API (e.g., FindCo-

provider), the second instance of the audio driver has already been loaded, the first instance may unload itself. As a result, only instance of the same driver will be loaded in the memory.

[0054] Figure 6A is a flow diagram illustrating a process performed by an instance of a driver according to one embodiment. Note that process 600 may be performed by processing logic which may include software, hardware, or a combination of both. For example, process 600 may be performed by the kernel when initializing a device driver. Referring to Figure 6A, at block 601, the kernel creates a new driver object for a node of a device tree, where the new driver object is identified by an identifier (e.g., driver handle or pointer). At block 602, the kernel calls an initialization routine of the new driver object which invokes an API of the kernel (e.g., FindCo-provider) to determine whether there is another driver instance has been already loaded. At block 603, if there is no other driver instance existing, the kernel starts the new driver object. Otherwise, at block 604, the kernel unloads the newly created driver object.

[0055] Figure 6B is a flow diagram illustrating a process of an API of a kernel according to one embodiment of the invention. Note that process 650 may be performed by processing logic which may include software, hardware, or a combination of both. For example, process 650 may be performed by the kernel to provide an API (e.g., FindCo-provider) to enable device drivers to determine whether there is an instance of a driver has been started. Referring to Figure 6B, at block 651, the kernel receives, as part of an API, a request from a first driver instance associated with a first device node of a device tree to determine whether a second driver instance associated with a second device node exists. The first and second device nodes are supported by the same driver. At block 652, the kernel performs a lookup operation in a dictionary having entries, where each entry representing a device having a unique device name and its associated driver. At block 653, based on a device name extracted from the request, the kernel identifies the corresponding entry and determine whether the entry is already associated with a driver (e.g., the corresponding entry includes a driver handle of the driver). At block 654, if there is no driver handle exists, insert an

identifier of the first driver instance in the entry of the dictionary and returns the identifier of the first driver instance. Otherwise, at block 655, the kernel returns the driver identifier exists in the dictionary. Other operations may also be performed. Figures 7A-7D illustrate pseudo codes of certain routines representing at least some of the operations described above.

[0056] According to certain embodiments of the invention, certain properties of a device node in a device tree may be used to encode information regarding another device node and/or a device driver of that device node. As a result, a driver of a first device node may invoke or communicate with a driver of a second device node using property information retrieved from the device tree. For example, based on the information retrieved from a device tree, a first driver may communicate with the kernel to receive a driver handle of a second driver and call the second driver via the driver handle of the second driver. Alternatively, the first driver may instruct the kernel to directly call the second driver based on the information retrieved from the device tree. In these examples, the second driver being called may not need to know who is calling and the first driver does not need to know where to call the second driver. That is, the first driver may know that someone else can help on certain functionality, but it does not know who has the capability of performing such functionality.

[0057] Figure 8 is a diagram illustrating an example of a device tree where a device node encodes information regarding another device node, according to one embodiment of the invention. Referring to Figure 8, device tree 800 includes a root device 801 having one or more child device nodes 802-803. Note that there may be one or more device nodes (e.g., intermediate nodes or parent/sub-parent nodes) between device nodes 802-803 and root device 801. Device node 802 is associated with a data structure 805 representing properties or attributes of device node 802. Like wise, device node 803 is associated with a data structure 806 representing properties or attributes of device node 803.

[0058] In one embodiment, for example, data structure 805 of device node 802 includes information encoded as part of property 807 regarding another device node 803 and/or a device driver associated with device node 803. Based

on the encoded information retrieved from property 807, a driver associated with device node 802 may locate a driver associated with device node 803 and invoke the driver associated with device node 803. This is typically useful when one driver of a device is responsible of certain functionality (e.g., control and data signal communications) while another driver is responsible for other functionality of the same device (e.g., power management or clock signal control).

[0059] For example, based on information extracted from property 807, a first driver of first device node 802 may communicate with the root device 801 or kernel to locate a second driver of device node 803. In a particularly, embodiment, property 807 may include an identifier regarding device node 803, such as, for example, a device name. When the first driver needs to invoke the second driver, although the first driver does not know who and where the second driver is, the first driver (or its parent) retrieves the encoded information from the device tree. The first driver then communicates with the kernel with the retrieved information. Based on the information provided by the first driver, the kernel (e.g., root device 801) performs a lookup operation in dictionary 804 to determine a driver identifier (e.g., driver handle) of the second device node 803. The kernel returns the driver handle of device node 803 back to the first driver and thereafter, the first driver may invoke the second driver via the associated driver handle. Alternatively, the kernel may directly invoke the second driver. Other configurations may exist.

[0060] Figure 9 is a diagram illustrating a particular example of having information encoded within a device node to allow the device node to invoke a driver of another device node, according to one embodiment of the invention. In this example, device tree 900 is implemented using object oriented techniques which resembles the architecture of the device tree 900. Referring to Figure 9, device tree 900 includes a root device node 901 having child device nodes 902-904 on one branch and one or more device nodes such as device node 905 on another branch. Each of the device nodes 901-905 is associated with a class of function and data members 906-910.

[0061] Note that in this example, C/C++ is used as an example of object oriented programming (OOP) language; however, other OOP languages may also be applied. It will be appreciated that an OOP language is not required to practice embodiments of the invention. Other non-OOP programming languages (e.g., assembly) may also be utilized. Other programming languages (e.g., assembly) may also be utilized. Referring to Figure 9, when device node 904 needs to invoke a driver 910 of device node 905 to control clock signals of a device associated with device node 904, such as, for example, turning off the clock, its corresponding function member 909 invokes its parent (e.g., “provider”) function 908. Within the function 908, the encoded information is retrieved from the device tree (e.g., getProperty). In this example, data of a property of “clock_gates” under device node 903 is retrieved. Thereafter, the parent function 907 of function 908 is invoked which in turn communicates with function 906 of root device node 901. Based on the encoded information retrieved from the device tree, function 906 determines (e.g., via dictionary) a driver handle of driver associated with 905 and the corresponding function member 910. Thereafter, function 910 is called. As a result, a driver associated with device node 904 can invoke a driver associated with device node 905 based on information extracted from the device tree.

[0062] Figure 10 is a flow diagram illustrating a process that enables a driver to communicate with another driver using a device tree according to one embodiment of the invention. Note that process 1000 may be performed by processing logic which may include software, hardware, or a combination of both. Referring to Figure 10, at block 1001, a first driver of a first device node in a device tree retrieves information from the device tree regarding a particular functionality that can be operated on the associated device. At block 1002, the first driver communicates with the kernel of an operating system and provides the retrieved information to the kernel for requesting a driver identified by the information to be invoked. At block 1003, the kernel identifies, via dictionary, a second driver that is capable of perform such functionality based on the provided information. At block 1004, the kernel retrieves a driver handle of the second

driver from the dictionary and returns the driver handle to the first driver. At block 1005, the first driver invokes the second driver using the driver handle returned from the kernel. Other operations may also be performed.

[0063] Figure 11 is a block diagram of a digital processing system, which may be used with one embodiment of the invention. For example, the system 1100 shown in Figure 11 may be used as a system as described above with respect to Figures 1 and/or 4A. Note that while Figure 11 illustrates various components of a computer system, it is not intended to represent any particular architecture or manner of interconnecting the components, as such details are not germane to the present invention. It will also be appreciated that network computers, handheld computers, cell phones and other data processing systems which have fewer components or perhaps more components may also be used with the present invention.

[0064] As shown in Figure 11, the system 1100, which is a form of a data processing system, includes a bus or interconnect 1102 which is coupled to one or more microprocessors 1103 and a ROM 1107, a volatile RAM 1105, and a non-volatile memory 1106. The microprocessor 1103, which may be, for example, a PowerPC G4 or PowerPC G5 microprocessor from Motorola, Inc. or IBM, is coupled to cache memory 1104 as shown in the example of Figure 11. The bus 1102 interconnects these various components together and also interconnects these components 1103, 1107, 1105, and 1106 to a display controller and display device 1108, as well as to input/output (I/O) devices 1110, which may be mice, keyboards, modems, network interfaces, printers, and other devices which are well-known in the art.

[0065] Typically, the input/output devices 1110 are coupled to the system through input/output controllers 1109. The volatile RAM 1105 is typically implemented as dynamic RAM (DRAM) which requires power continuously in order to refresh or maintain the data in the memory. The non-volatile memory 1106 is typically a magnetic hard drive, a magnetic optical drive, an optical drive, or a DVD RAM or other type of memory system which maintains data even after

power is removed from the system. Typically, the non-volatile memory will also be a random access memory, although this is not required.

[0066] While Figure 11 shows that the non-volatile memory is a local device coupled directly to the rest of the components in the data processing system, the present invention may utilize a non-volatile memory which is remote from the system; such as, a network storage device which is coupled to the data processing system through a network interface such as a modem or Ethernet interface. The bus 1102 may include one or more buses connected to each other through various bridges, controllers, and/or adapters, as is well-known in the art. In one embodiment, the I/O controller 1109 includes a USB (Universal Serial Bus) adapter for controlling USB peripherals. Alternatively, I/O controller 1109 may include an IEEE-1394 adapter, also known as FireWire adapter, for controlling FireWire devices.

[0067] Figure 12 is a block diagram of a digital processing system, which may be used with another embodiment of the invention. For example, the system 1200 shown in Figure 12 may be used as a system as described above with respect to Figures 1 and/or 4A. The data processing system 1200 shown in Figure 12 includes a processing system 1211, which may include one or more microprocessors, or which may be a system on a chip integrated circuit, and the system also includes memory 1201 for storing data and programs for execution by the processing system. The system 1200 also includes a media (e.g., audio/video) input/output subsystem 1205 which may include, for example, a microphone and a speaker for, for example, playing back music or providing telephone functionality through the speaker and microphone. A display controller and display device 1207 provide a visual user interface for the user.

[0068] This digital interface may include a graphical user interface which is similar to that shown on a typical computer, such as, for example, a Macintosh computer when running OS X operating system software. The system 1200 also includes a communication interface (e.g., wired or wireless communication interface) 1203, such as, for example, one or more wireless transceivers to communicate with another system or device. A wireless transceiver may be a

WiFi transceiver, an infrared (IR) transceiver, a Bluetooth transceiver, and/or a wireless cellular telephony transceiver. It will be appreciated that additional components, not shown, may also be part of the system 1200 in certain embodiments, and in certain embodiments fewer components than shown in Figure 12 may also be used in a data processing system.

[0069] The data processing system 1200 also includes one or more input devices 1213 which are provided to allow a user to provide input to the system. These input devices may be a keypad or a keyboard or a touch panel or a multi touch panel. Alternatively, input devices 1213 may include a voice interactive interface that can receive and interact with a voice command. The data processing system 1200 also includes an optional input/output device 1215 which may be a connector for a dock. It will be appreciated that one or more buses, not shown, may be used to interconnect the various components as is well known in the art. The data processing system shown in Figure 12 may be a handheld computer or a personal digital assistant (PDA), or a cellular telephone with PDA like functionality, or a handheld computer which includes a cellular telephone, or a media player, such as an iPod, or devices which combine aspects or functions of these devices, such as a media player combined with a PDA and a cellular telephone in one device. In other embodiments, the data processing system 1200 may be a network computer or an embedded processing device within another device, or other types of data processing systems which have fewer components or perhaps more components than that shown in Figure 12.

[0070] At least certain embodiments of the inventions may be part of a digital media player, such as a portable music and/or video media player, which may include a media processing system to present the media, a storage device to store the media and may further include a radio frequency (RF) transceiver (e.g., an RF transceiver for a cellular telephone) coupled with an antenna system and the media processing system. In certain embodiments, media stored on a remote storage device may be transmitted to the media player through the RF transceiver. The media may be, for example, one or more of music or other audio, still pictures, or motion pictures.

[0071] The portable media player may include a media selection device, such as a click wheel input device on an iPod® or iPod Nano® media player from Apple Computer, Inc. of Cupertino, CA, a touch screen input device, pushbutton device, movable pointing input device or other input device. The media selection device may be used to select the media stored on the storage device and/or the remote storage device. The portable media player may, in at least certain embodiments, include a display device which is coupled to the media processing system to display titles or other indicators of media being selected through the input device and being presented, either through a speaker or earphone(s), or on the display device, or on both display device and a speaker or earphone(s). Examples of a portable media player are described in published U.S. patent application numbers 2003/0095096 and 2004/0224638, both of which are incorporated herein by reference. Other configurations may exist.

[0072] Some portions of the preceding detailed descriptions have been presented in terms of algorithms and symbolic representations of operations on data bits within a computer memory. These algorithmic descriptions and representations are the ways used by those skilled in the data processing arts to most effectively convey the substance of their work to others skilled in the art. An algorithm is here, and generally, conceived to be a self-consistent sequence of operations leading to a desired result. The operations are those requiring physical manipulations of physical quantities. Usually, though not necessarily, these quantities take the form of electrical or magnetic signals capable of being stored, transferred, combined, compared, and otherwise manipulated. It has proven convenient at times, principally for reasons of common usage, to refer to these signals as bits, values, elements, symbols, characters, terms, numbers, or the like.

[0073] It should be borne in mind, however, that all of these and similar terms are to be associated with the appropriate physical quantities and are merely convenient labels applied to these quantities. Unless specifically stated otherwise as apparent from the above discussion, it is appreciated that throughout the description, discussions utilizing terms such as "processing" or "computing" or "calculating" or "determining" or "displaying" or the like, refer to the action and

processes of a computer system, or similar electronic computing device, that manipulates and transforms data represented as physical (electronic) quantities within the computer system's registers and memories into other data similarly represented as physical quantities within the computer system memories or registers or other such information storage, transmission or display devices.

[0074] Embodiments of the present invention also relate to an apparatus for performing the operations herein. This apparatus may be specially constructed for the required purposes, or it may comprise a general-purpose computer selectively activated or reconfigured by a computer program stored in the computer. Such a computer program may be stored in a computer readable storage medium, such as, but is not limited to, any type of disk including floppy disks, optical disks, CD-ROMs, and magnetic-optical disks, read-only memories (ROMs), random access memories (RAMs), erasable programmable ROMs (EPROMs), electrically erasable programmable ROMs (EEPROMs), magnetic or optical cards, or any type of media suitable for storing electronic instructions, and each coupled to a computer system bus.

[0075] The algorithms and displays presented herein are not inherently related to any particular computer or other apparatus. Various general-purpose systems may be used with programs in accordance with the teachings herein, or it may prove convenient to construct more specialized apparatus to perform the required method operations. The required structure for a variety of these systems will appear from the description below. In addition, embodiments of the present invention are not described with reference to any particular programming language. It will be appreciated that a variety of programming languages may be used to implement the teachings of embodiments of the invention as described herein.

[0076] A machine-readable medium may include any mechanism for storing or transmitting information in a form readable by a machine (e.g., a computer). For example, a machine-readable medium includes read only memory ("ROM"); random access memory ("RAM"); magnetic disk storage media; optical storage

media; flash memory devices; electrical, optical, acoustical or other form of propagated signals (e.g., carrier waves, infrared signals, digital signals, etc.); etc.

[0077] In the foregoing specification, embodiments of the invention have been described with reference to specific exemplary embodiments thereof. It will be evident that various modifications may be made thereto without departing from the broader spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the following claims. The specification and drawings are, accordingly, to be regarded in an illustrative sense rather than a restrictive sense.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A machine-implemented method for managing device drivers of devices in a computer, the method comprising:
 - providing an application programming interface (API) within a kernel of an operating system (OS) running within a computer, the API being accessible by a plurality of device drivers associated with a plurality of devices in the computer; and
 - in response to a request from a first instance of a device driver via the API, returning information indicating whether a second instance of the device driver is currently loaded within the kernel.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein each of the plurality of devices is represented by a node of a device tree having a hierarchical structure, and wherein the API is maintained by a node that is a most top node in the device tree.
3. The method of claim 1, further comprising, in response to the request and as part of the API, accessing a data structure having a plurality entries corresponding to the plurality of devices in the computer, wherein each entry includes a first field to store an identifier of a corresponding device and a second field to store a handle of a device driver currently associated with the corresponding device.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising acquiring a lock prior to accessing the data structure to prevent others from accessing the data structure and releasing the lock after accessing the data structure to allow others to access the data structure.

5. The method of claim 3, further comprising:
the API inserting a first handle of the first instance of the device driver in
the second field of a corresponding device in the data structure if
the second field is empty; and
the API returning a first handle of the first instance of the device driver.
6. The method of claim 5, further comprising starting the first instance of
the device driver if the second field of the corresponding device is empty.
7. The method of claim 5, further comprising the API returning a second
handle of the second instance of the device driver retrieved from the second field
of the corresponding device if the second instance of the device driver is currently
associated with the corresponding device.
8. The method of claim 7, further comprising unloading the first instance of
the device driver if the second instance of the device driver is currently loaded.
9. The method of claim 3, wherein each of the plurality of devices is
represented by a node of a device tree having a hierarchical structure, each being
associated with a device driver, wherein the first instance of the device driver is
associated with a first device node and the second instance of the device driver is
associated with a second device node of the device tree, and wherein devices
corresponding to the first and second device nodes are supported by the same
device driver.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein the first device node includes a property
attribute to store a first identifier of a device corresponding to the first device
node and the second device node includes a property attribute to store a second
identifier of a device corresponding to the second device node, and wherein the
first and second identifiers are used by the API to determine which of the first
and second instances of the device driver is loaded.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the first and second identifiers are identical and unique in the device tree, which indicates that the first and second device nodes are supported by the same device driver.
12. A machine-readable medium having instructions stored herein, which when executed by a computer, cause a machine to perform a method, the method comprising:
 - providing an application programming interface (API) within a kernel of an operating system (OS) running within a computer, the API being accessible by a plurality of device drivers associated with a plurality of devices in the computer; and
 - in response to a request from a first instance of a device driver via the API, returning information indicating whether a second instance of the device driver is currently loaded within the kernel.
13. The machine-readable medium of claim 12, wherein each of the plurality of devices is represented by a node of a device tree having a hierarchical structure, and wherein the API is maintained by a node that is a most top node in the device tree.
14. The machine-readable medium of claim 12, wherein the method further comprises, in response to the request and as part of the API, accessing a data structure having a plurality entries corresponding to the plurality of devices in the computer, wherein each entry includes a first field to store an identifier of a corresponding device and a second field to store a handle of a device driver currently associated with the corresponding device.
15. The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the method further comprises acquiring a lock prior to accessing the data structure to prevent others

from accessing the data structure and releasing the lock after accessing the data structure to allow others to access the data structure.

16. The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the method further comprises:

the API inserting a first handle of the first instance of the device driver in the second field of a corresponding device in the data structure if the second field is empty; and
the API returning a first handle of the first instance of the device driver.

17. The machine-readable medium of claim 16, wherein the method further comprises starting the first instance of the device driver if the second field of the corresponding device is empty.

18. The machine-readable medium of claim 16, wherein the method further comprises the API returning a second handle of the second instance of the device driver retrieved from the second field of the corresponding device if the second instance of the device driver is currently associated with the corresponding device.

19. The machine-readable medium of claim 18, wherein the method further comprises unloading the first instance of the device driver if the second instance of the device driver is currently loaded.

20. The machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein each of the plurality of devices is represented by a node of a device tree having a hierarchical structure, each being associated with a device driver, wherein the first instance of the device driver is associated with a first device node and the second instance of the device driver is associated with a second device node of the device tree, and wherein devices corresponding to the first and second device nodes are supported by the same device driver.

21. The machine-readable medium of claim 20, wherein the first device node includes a property attribute to store a first identifier of a device corresponding to the first device node and the second device node includes a property attribute to store a second identifier of a device corresponding to the second device node, and wherein the first and second identifiers are used by the API to determine which of the first and second instances of the device driver is loaded.

22. The machine-readable medium of claim 21, wherein the first and second identifiers are identical and unique in the device tree, which indicates that the first and second device nodes are supported by the same device driver.

23. An apparatus for managing device drivers of devices in a computer, the method comprising:

means for providing an application programming interface (API) within a kernel of an operating system (OS) running within a computer, the API being accessible by a plurality of device drivers associated with a plurality of devices in the computer; and

in response to a request from a first instance of a device driver via the API, means for returning information indicating whether a second instance of the device driver is currently loaded within the kernel.

24. A computer system architecture, comprising:

a plurality of device drivers loaded in a kernel of an operating system of a computer, each of the device drivers corresponding to a device presented in the computer; and

an application programming interface (API) for coupling the kernel with the plurality of device drivers, the API enabling an instance of a device driver to communicate with the kernel to determine whether another instance of the device driver is currently loaded.

25. The architecture of claim 23, wherein the API is invoked during an initialization of the instance of the device driver.
26. The architecture of claim 23, further comprising a device map maintained by the kernel, the device map having a plurality of entries and each corresponding to a device, wherein the device map is accessible by the kernel as part of the API to determine whether an instance of a device driver for a particular device is loaded.
27. The architecture of claim 25, wherein the device map includes a first field to store an identifier of a corresponding device and a second field to store a driver handle of a device driver associated with the corresponding device.
28. The architecture of claim 26, wherein the API returns a driver handle of an existing driver specified in a second field of a device, indicating that the existing driver has been loaded.
29. A computer implemented method, comprising:
a first instance of a driver calling an application programming interface (API) maintained by a kernel of an operating system, the first instance of the driver being identified via a first driver identifier;
and
in response to a result of calling the API, the first instance of the driver determining whether a second instance of the driver has been initialized.
30. The method of claim 29, further comprising examining a second driver identifier returned by the API to determine whether the first and second driver identifiers are identical.
31. The method of claim 30, further comprising:

starting the first instance of the driver if the first and second driver identifiers are identical; and
unloading the first instance of the driver if the first and second driver identifiers are different.

32. A machine-readable medium having instructions stored therein, which when executed by a machine, cause a machine to perform a method, the method comprising:

a first instance of a driver calling an application programming interface (API) maintained by a kernel of an operating system, the first instance of the driver being identified via a first driver identifier;
and

in response to a result of calling the API, the first instance of the driver determining whether a second instance of the driver has been initialized.

33. The machine-readable medium of claim 32, wherein the method further comprises examining a second driver identifier returned by the API to determine whether the first and second driver identifiers are identical.

34. The machine-readable medium of claim 33, wherein the method further comprises:

starting the first instance of the driver if the first and second driver identifiers are identical; and
unloading the first instance of the driver if the first and second driver identifiers are different.

35. A machine implemented method, comprising:

in response to a request received from a first instance of a driver via an application program interface (API), determining whether a second instance of the driver for a device associated with the first

instance of the driver has already been initialized, wherein the determination is performed based on information retrieved from a data structure having driver registration information; and return a driver identifier to the first instance of the driver via the API, the driver identifier indicating whether a second instance of the driver has already been initialized.

36. The method of claim 35, further comprising:
performing a lookup operation within the data structure to determine whether a device identified by a device identifier extracted from the request is associated with a driver identifier; and returning the driver identifier associated with the device to the first instance of the driver via the API, if the device has been associated with the driver identifier in the data structure.
37. The method of claim 36, further comprising:
inserting a driver identifier of the first instance into the data structure of the device has not been associated with any driver identifier; and returning the driver identifier of the first instance to the first instance of the driver via the API.
38. A machine-readable medium having instructions stored therein, which when executed, cause a machine to perform a method, the method comprising:
in response to a request received from a first instance of a driver via an application program interface (API), determining whether a second instance of the driver for a device associated with the first instance of the driver has already been initialized, wherein the determination is performed based on information retrieved from a data structure having driver registration information; and

return a driver identifier to the first instance of the driver via the API, the driver identifier indicating whether a second instance of the driver has already been initialized.

39. The machine-readable medium of claim 38, wherein the method further comprises:

performing a lookup operation within the data structure to determine whether a device identified by a device identifier extracted from the request is associated with a driver identifier; and
returning the driver identifier associated with the device to the first instance of the driver via the API, if the device has been associated with the driver identifier in the data structure.

40. The machine-readable medium of claim 39, wherein the method further comprises:

inserting a driver identifier of the first instance into the data structure of the device has not been associated with any driver identifier; and
returning the driver identifier of the first instance to the first instance of the driver via the API.

41. A machine-implemented method for managing device drivers of devices in a computer, the method comprising:

providing an application programming interface (API) within an operating system (OS) running within a computer, the API being accessible by a plurality of device drivers associated with a plurality of devices in the computer; and
in response to a request from a first instance of a device driver via the API, returning information indicating whether a second instance of the device driver is currently loaded within the OS.

42. A machine-readable medium having a library to be loaded within an operating system of a computer, comprising:
an application programming interface (API) accessible by a plurality of device drivers associated with a plurality of devices in the computer,
wherein in response to a request from a first instance of a device driver via the API, the API is configured to return information indicating whether a second instance of the device driver is currently loaded within the OS.
43. The machine-readable medium of claim 42, wherein the library is a component of a kernel of the OS.

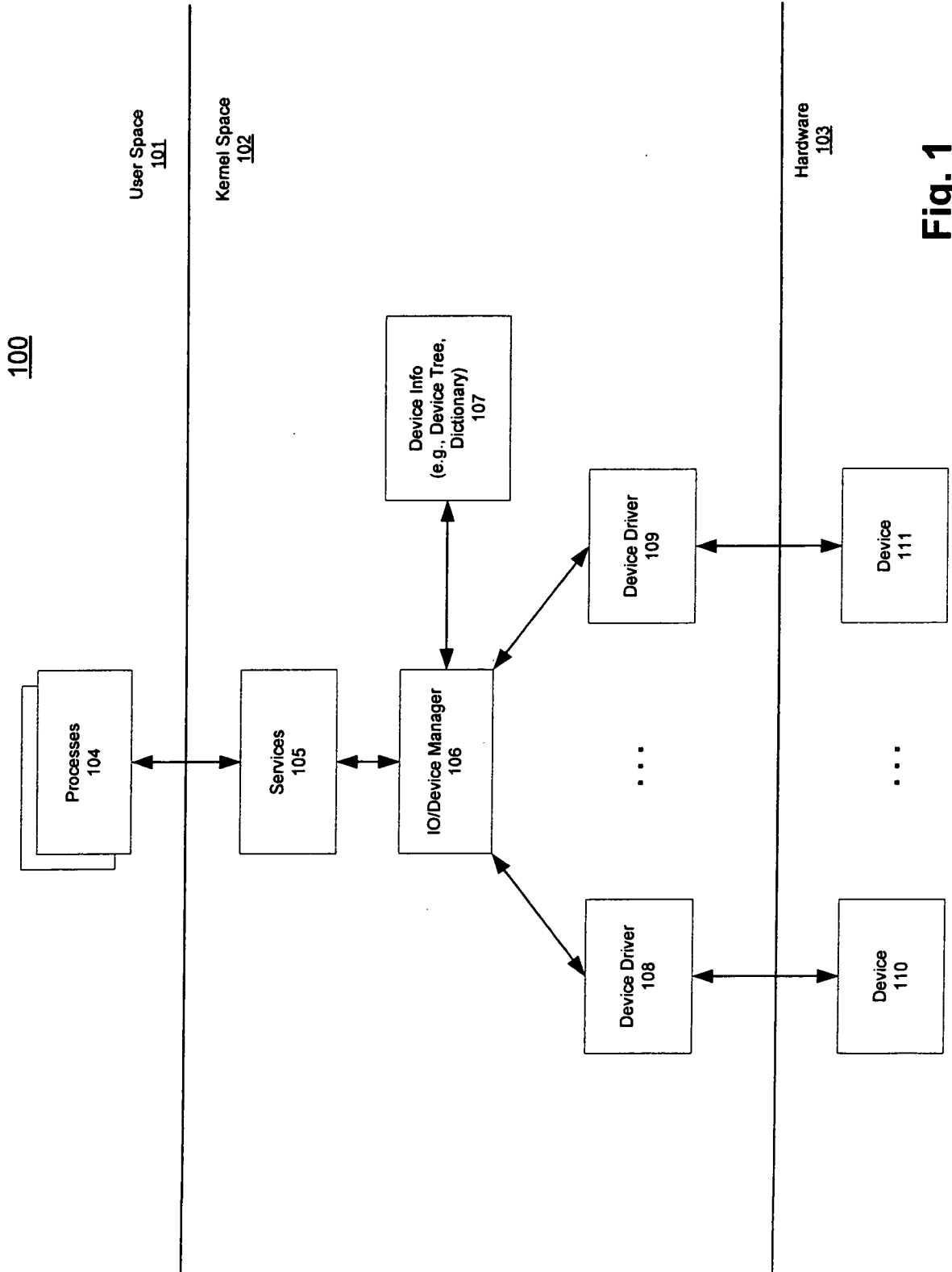


Fig. 1

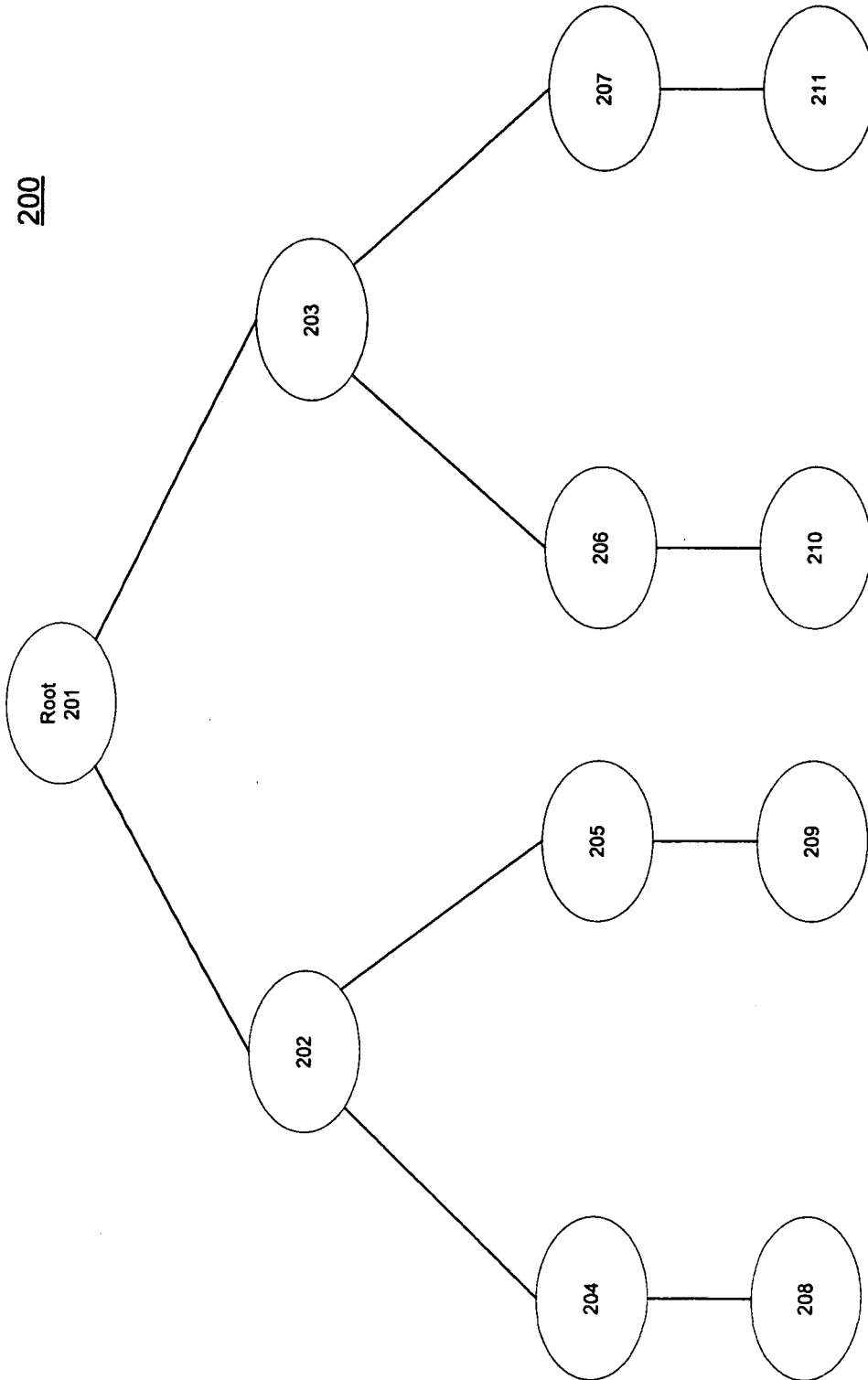


Fig. 2

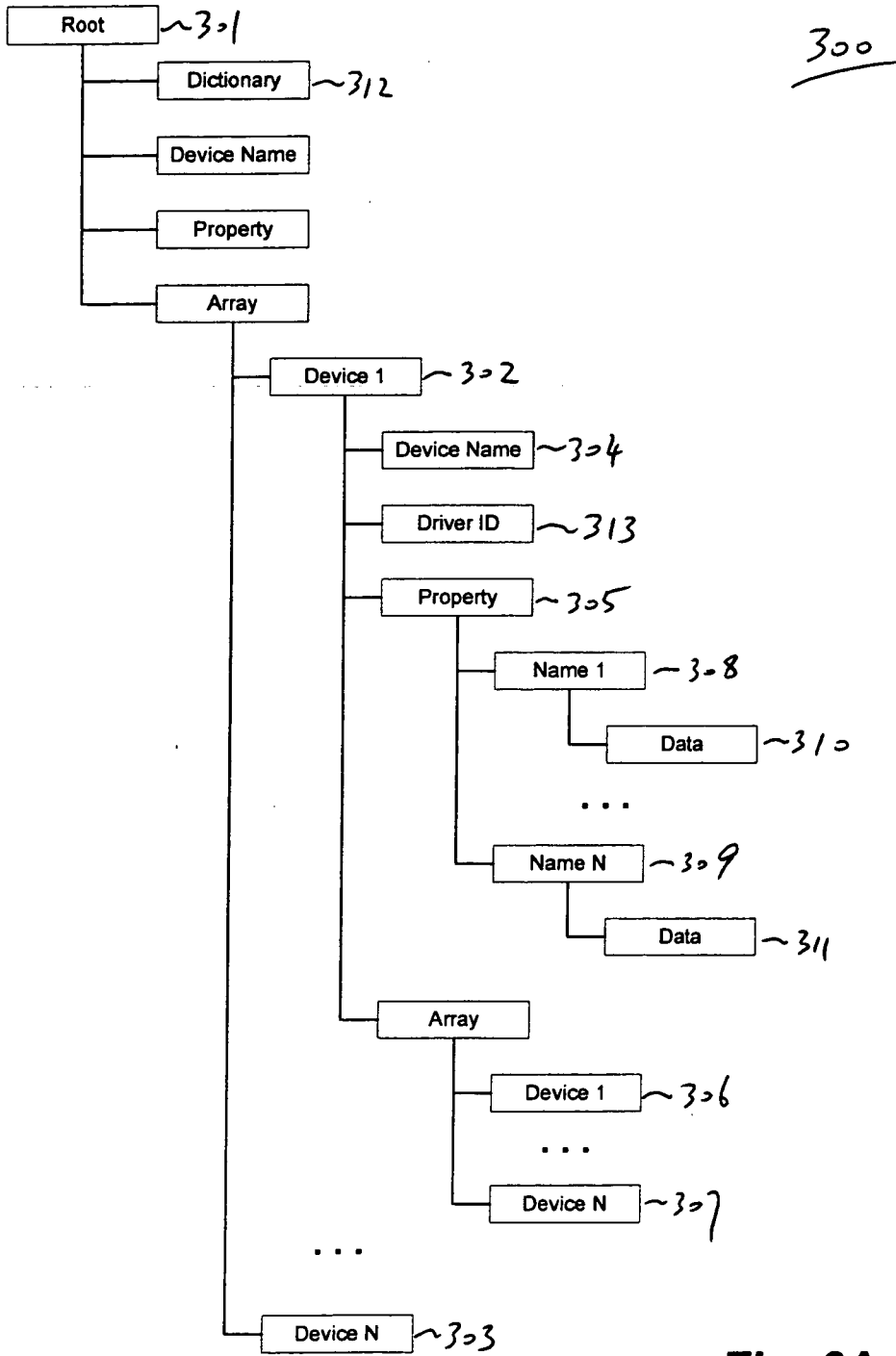
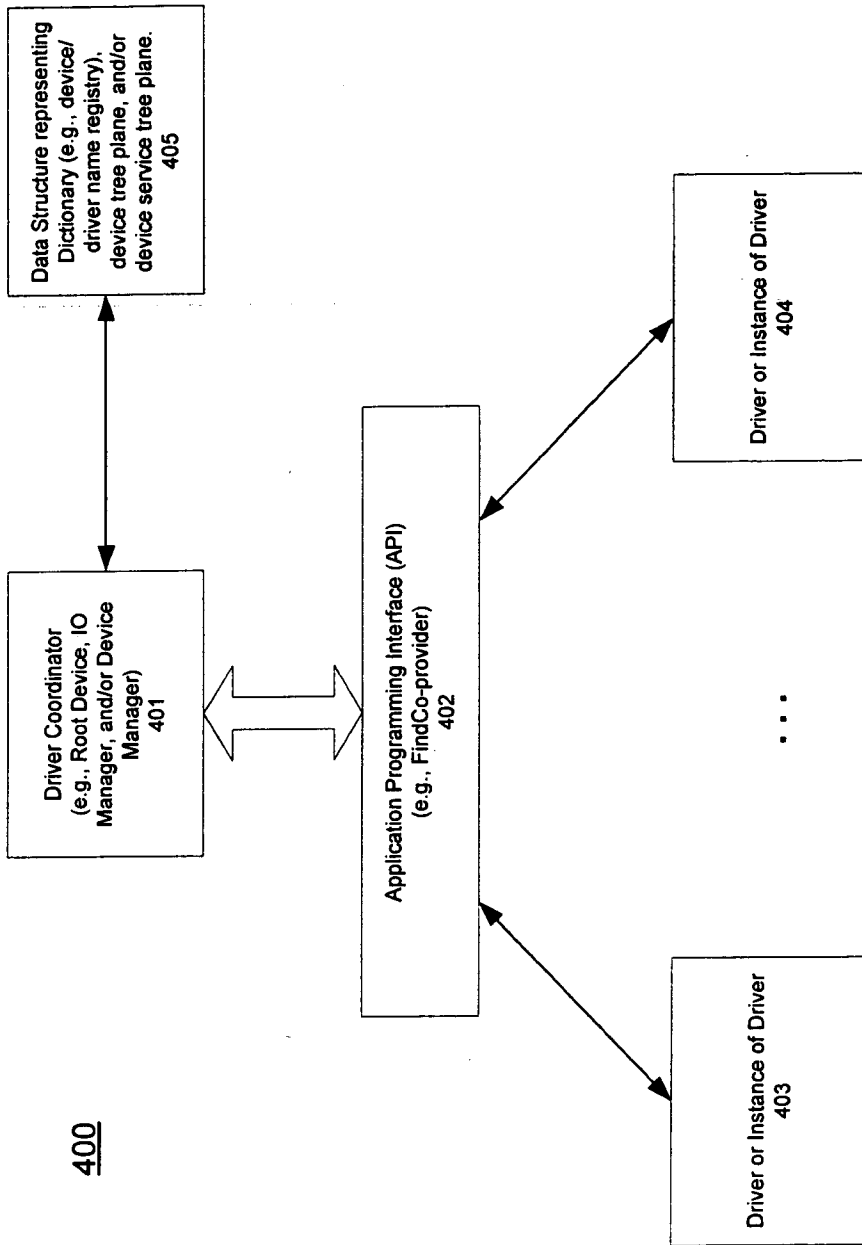


Fig. 3A

350

Device Identifier 351	Device Driver Identifier 352
---	---
---	---
Device Name 304	Device Driver Handle 313
---	---
---	---

Fig. 3B



400

Fig. 4A

450

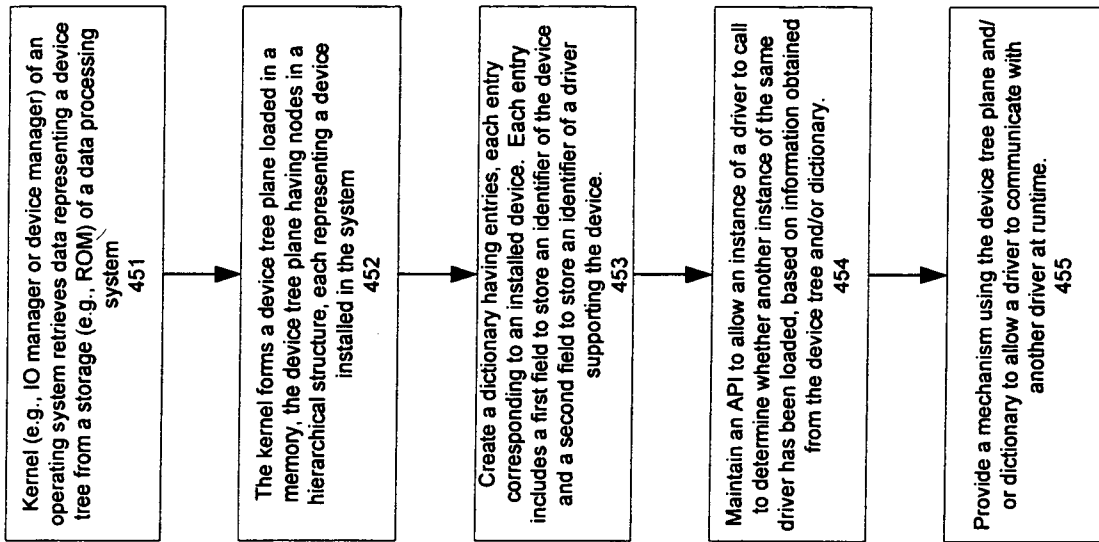


Fig. 4B

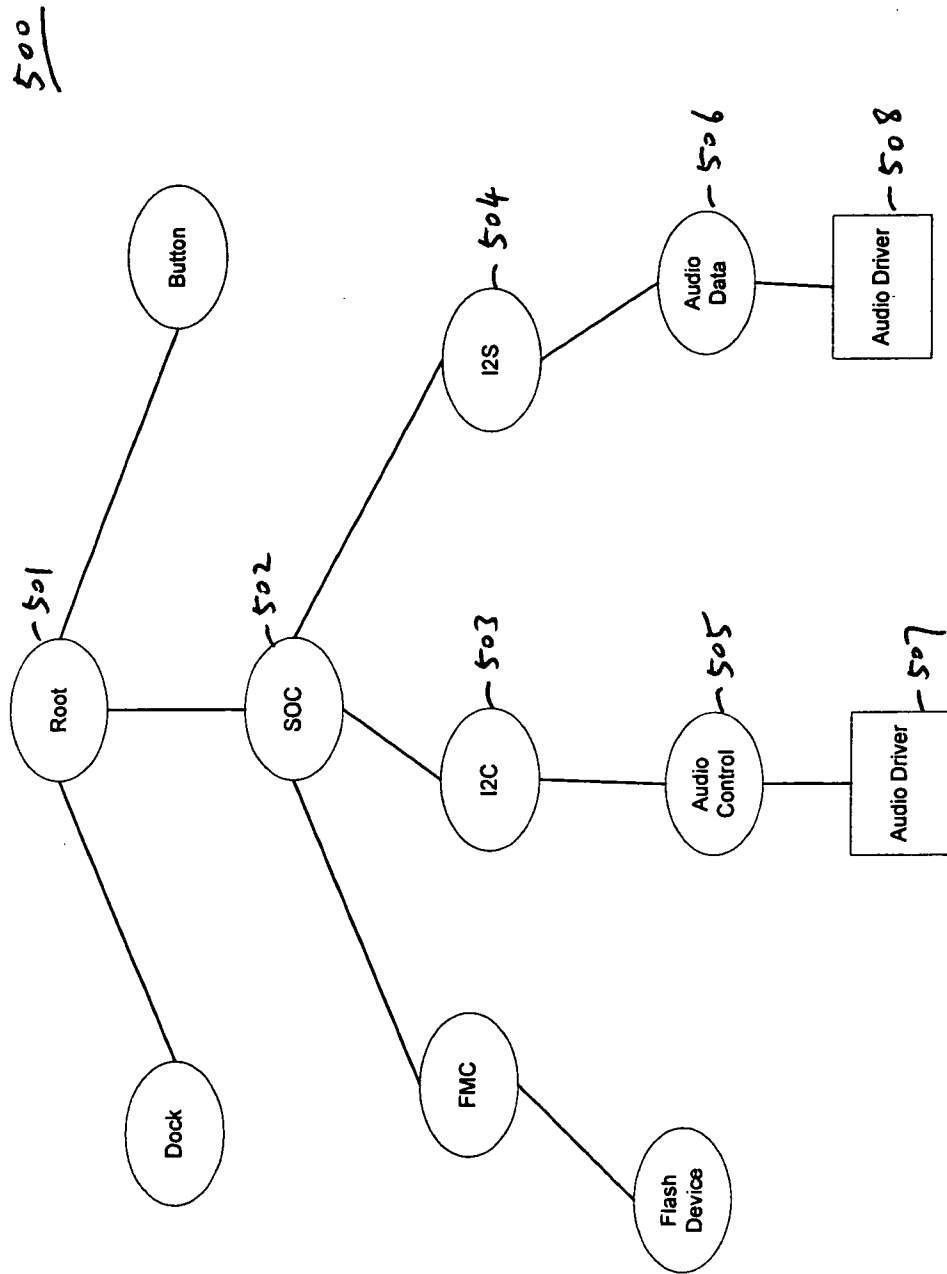
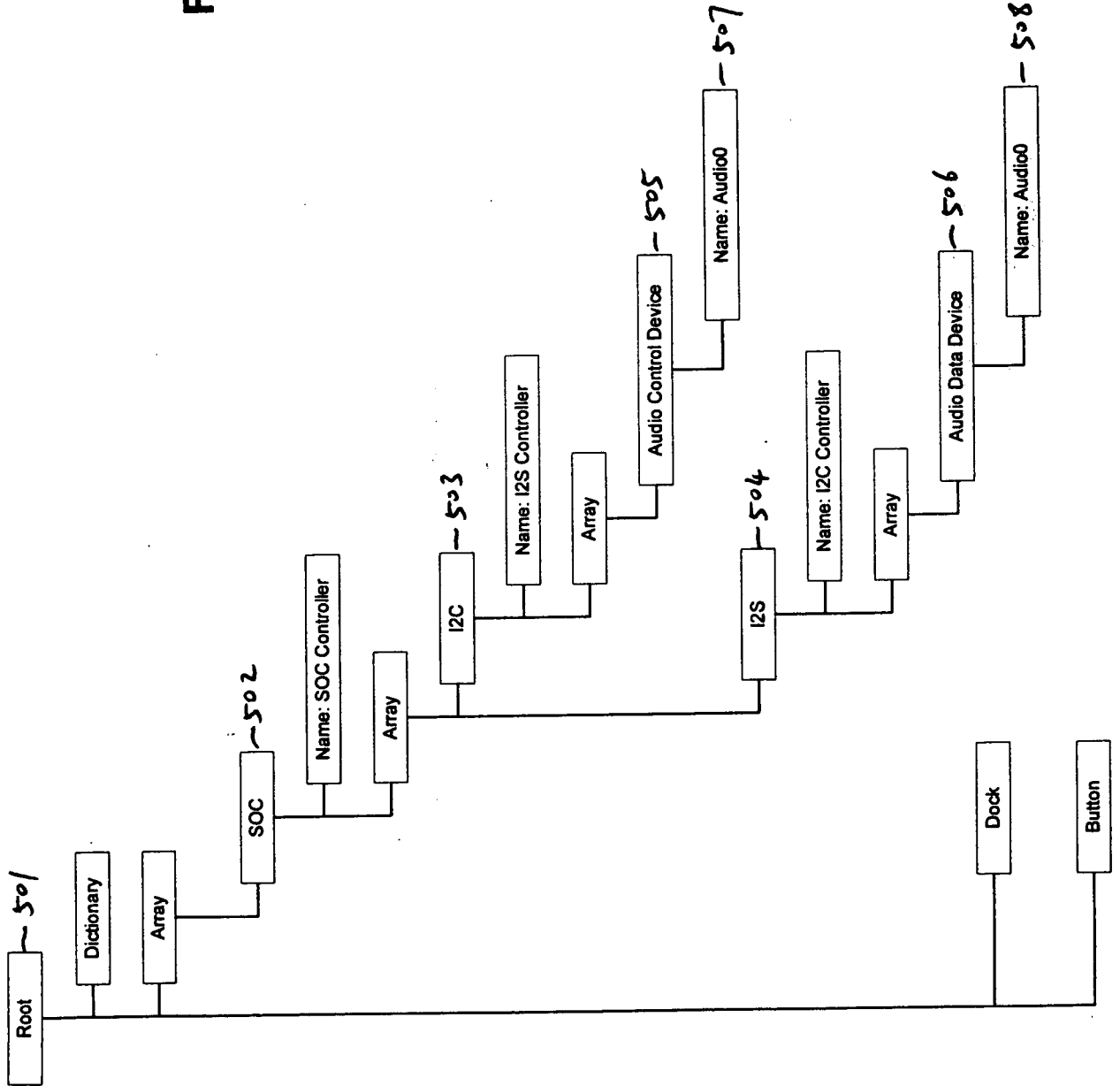


Fig. 5A

Fig. 5B



Device Identifier	Device Driver Identifier
...	...
SOC Controller	SOC Driver Handle
I2S Controller	I2S Driver Handle
I2C Controller	I2C Driver Handle
Audio0	Audio Driver Handle
...	...

Fig. 5C

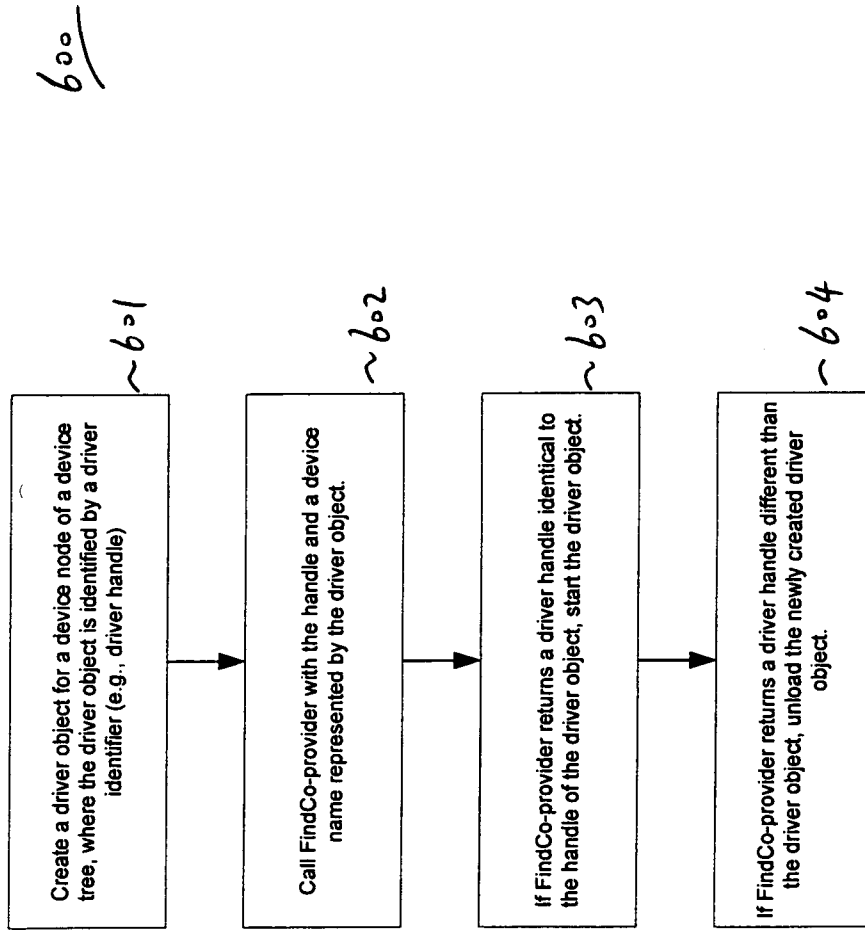


Fig. 6A

650

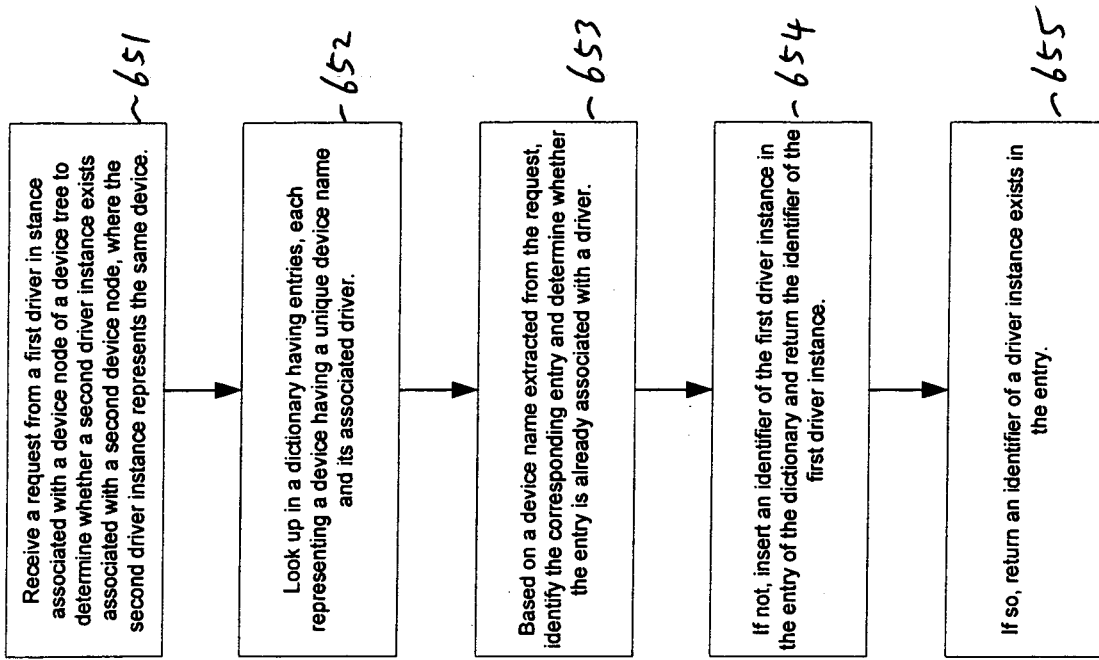


Fig. 6B

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```
IOManager::Initialize()
{
    ...
    pDriverObj = new DriverObj();

    if (pDriverObj == pDriverObj->Probe())
        pDriverObj->Start();
    else
        delete pDriverObj;

    ...
}
```

Fig. 7A

```
DriverObj::Probe()
{
    ...
    getProperty (this, &DeviceName);

    return FindCo-provider(this, DeviceName);
}
```

Fig. 7B

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```
FindCo-provider(pNewDriverObj, DeviceName)
{
    ...
    pDriverObj = LookupDictionary (DeviceName);

    if (pDriverObj != NULL)
        return pDriverObj;
    else
    {
        InsertDictionary (DeviceName, pNewDriverObj);
        return pNewDriverObj;
    }
    ...
}
```

Fig. 7C

```
Class DriverObj
{
    ...
    int Init();

    pDriverHandle Probe(DeviceName, pDriverHandle);

    int Start();
}
```

Fig. 7D

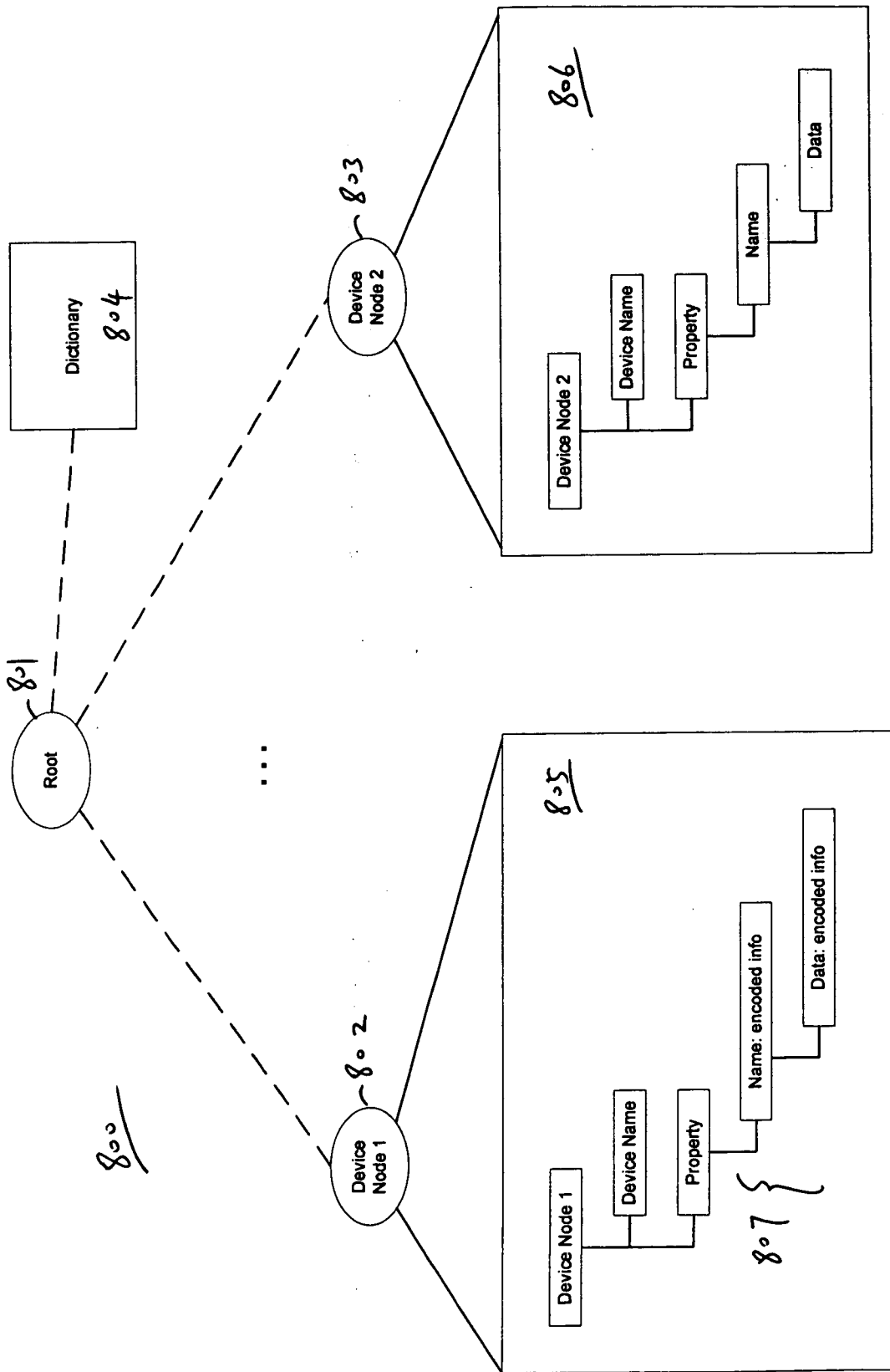


Fig. 8

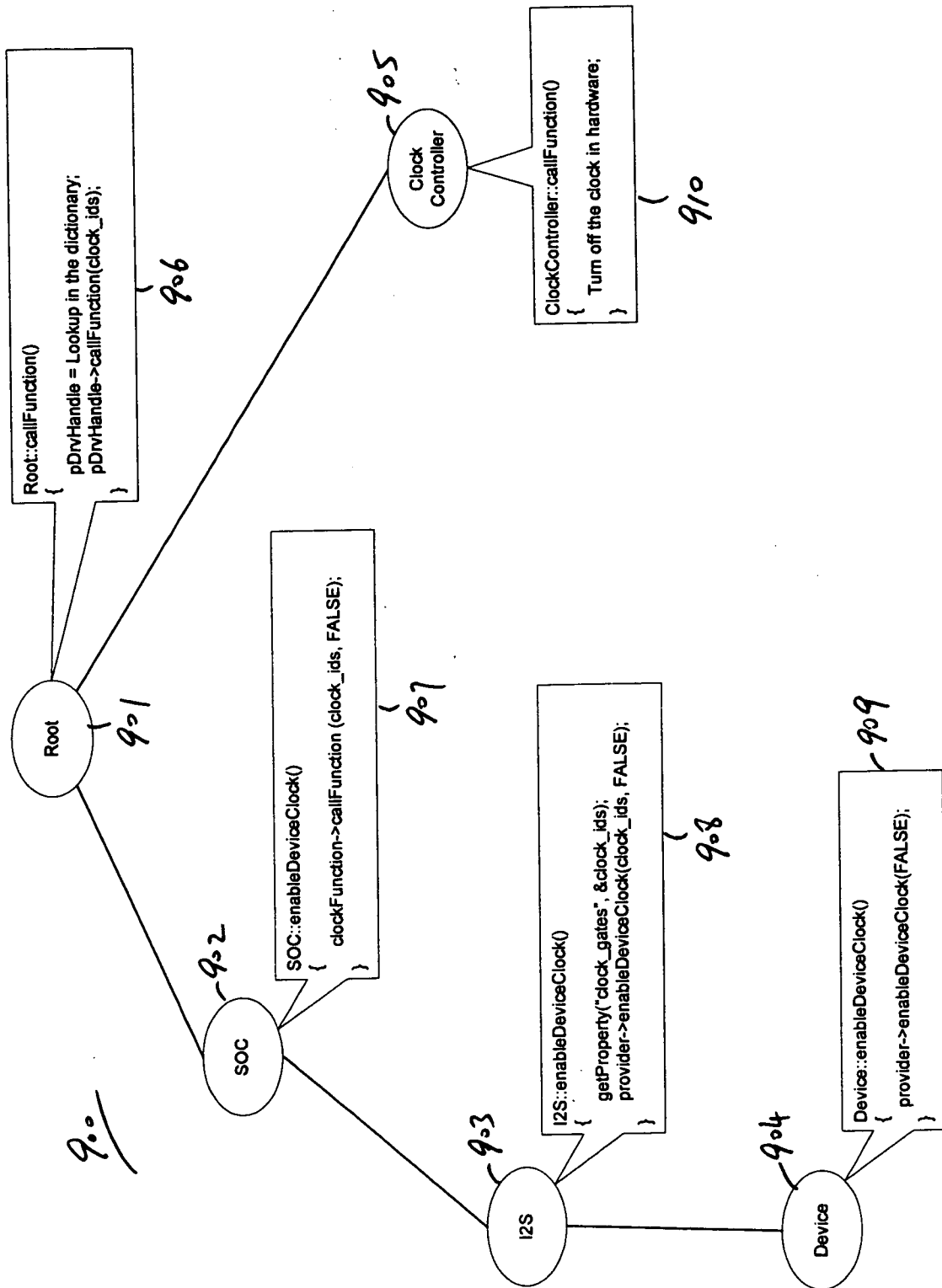


Fig. 9

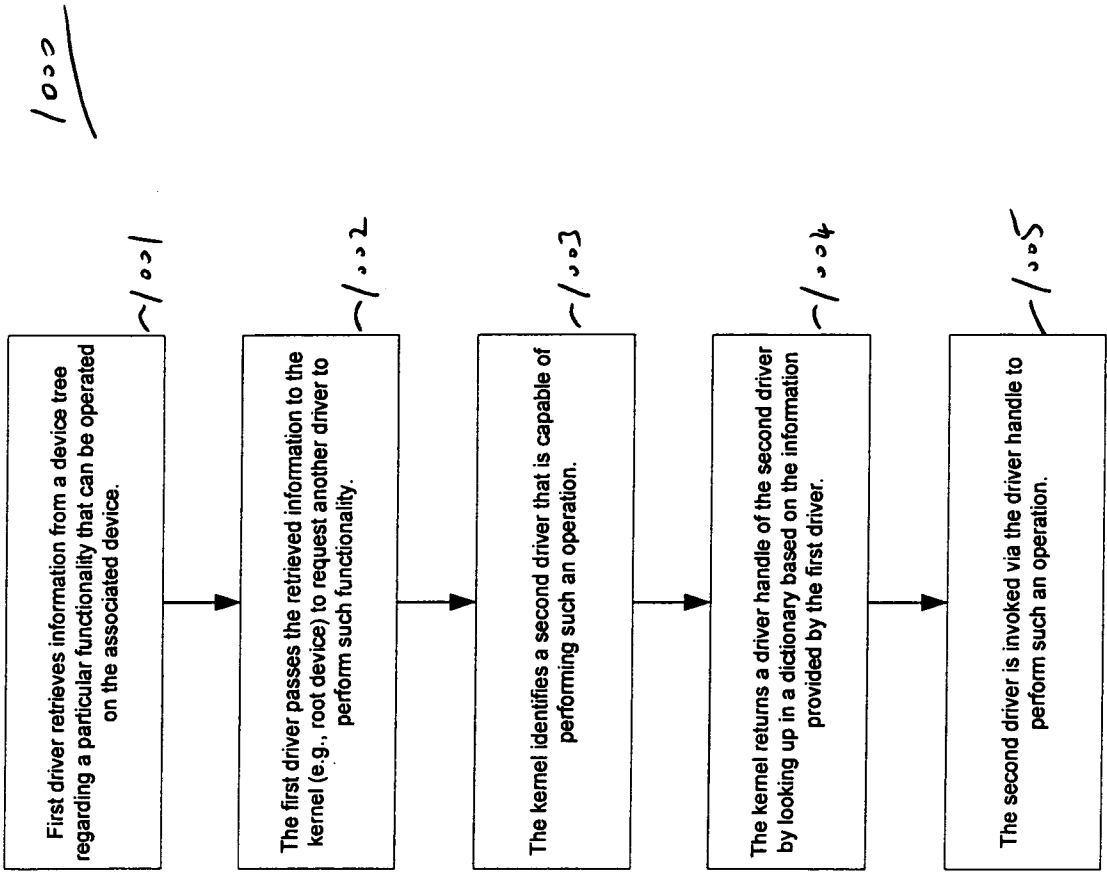


Fig. 10

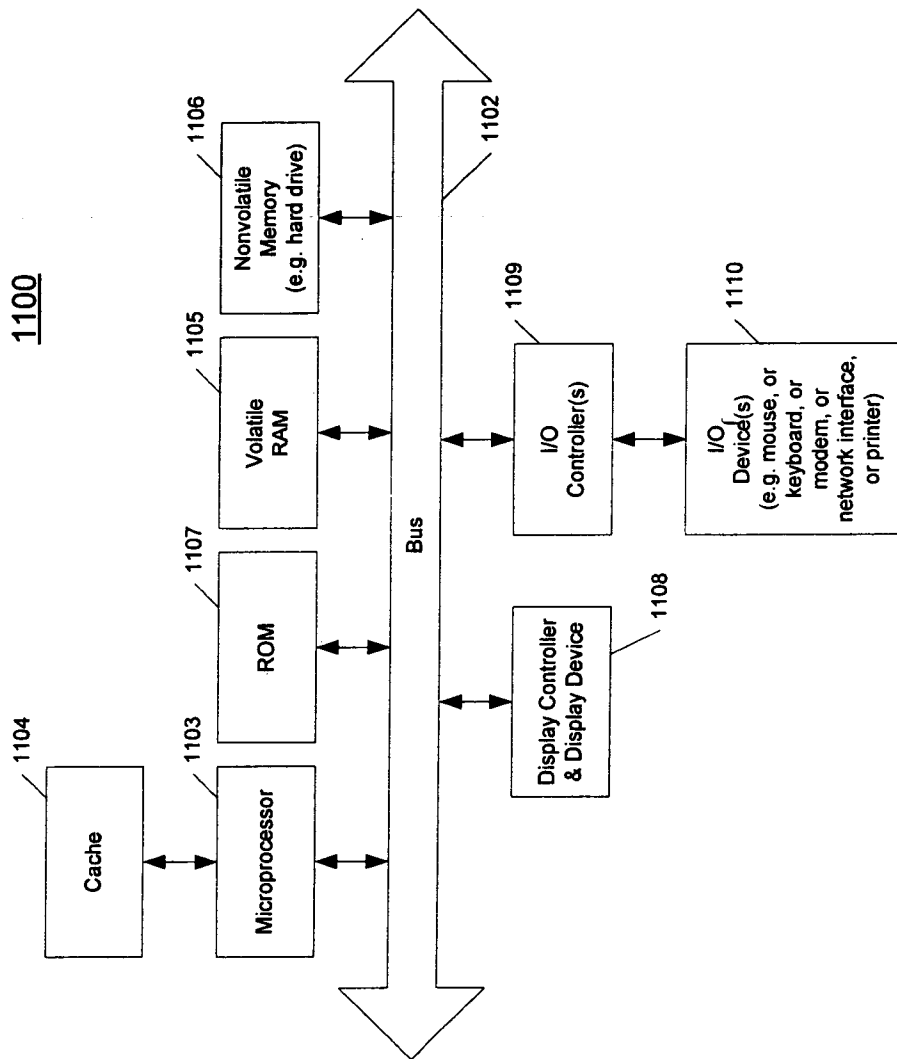


Fig. 11

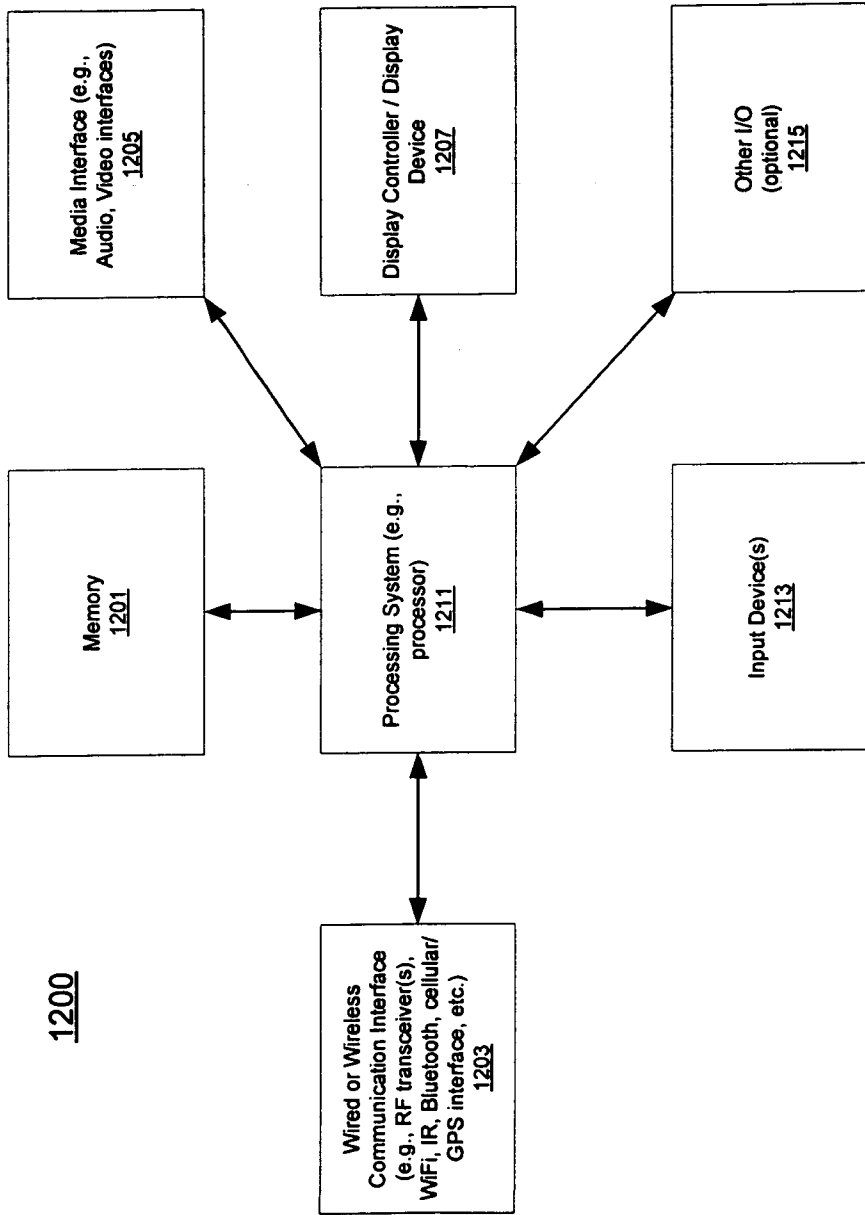


Fig. 12

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2007/025850

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. G06F9/445

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

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

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

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

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

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	EP 1 056 001 A (XEROX CORP [US]) 29 November 2000 (2000-11-29) paragraph [0010] - paragraph [0030]; figures 2-4	1-43
Y	US 6 393 557 B1 (GUTHRIDGE D SCOTT [US] ET AL) 21 May 2002 (2002-05-21) figures 1,3,6,7 column 7, line 66 - line 67 column 8, lines 1-27	1-43
A	US 2004/199920 A1 (RESCH PAUL M [US]) 7 October 2004 (2004-10-07) abstract	1-43
A	US 6 189 050 B1 (SAKARDA PREMANAND [US]) 13 February 2001 (2001-02-13) abstract	1-43

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2007/025850

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
EP 1056001	A	29-11-2000 JP 2001005622 A	12-01-2001
US 6393557	B1	21-05-2002 NONE	
US 2004199920	A1	07-10-2004 NONE	
US 6189050	B1	13-02-2001 NONE	