

# GCLViz: Garbage Collection vs. Latency Visualization

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**Abstract:** This paper proposes a method that creates a multi-view interactive visualization that allows users to explore connections between garbage collection (GC) generated by Java Virtual Machine (JVM) and latency in applications used in financial transactions. With this tool users can explore large collections of GC and latency events, easily identify important events, and subsequently focus on the relationships and details of such events without losing the “big picture” perspective on the events as a whole. We discuss the impact of this tool on controlling the effects of GC on latency and variability in financial trades with an exchange.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Securities exchanges have increasingly adopted a limit order market design, in which traders submit orders directly into exchange’s electronic systems, bypassing both designated and unofficial market makers. This transition from traditional to fully electronic limit order market (Kirilenko and Kyle, 2011) has made the rigid distinction between market makers and conventional traders obsolete. This transformation has occurred due to advances in technology, as well as regulatory requirements.

An increasingly important dimension of electronic trading is latency (Brogaard, 2010): the time between the release of a market message by the participant and its reception and execution by the exchange computers. Another important factor is variability. Variability in this context refers to dissimilarity in response times observed by market participants. Many factors may introduce variability into the message flow: network latency, packet retransmissions, operating system (OS) network stack and OS task scheduling, or the application itself. In order to reduce both latency and variability “co-location” is typically used, whereby market participants will rent space in a computer server centre next to an exchange. This approach leverages physical proximity to reduce the time a market message takes to arrive at the exchange. In addition, at such centres engineers work to optimize high-performance trading by eliminating the factors

causing the latency and variability. One important factor that may adversely affect performance is garbage collection (GC) generated by Java virtual machine (JVM).

Use of managed runtime-based languages in high performance computing environment is a fairly new development. For instance, recent advances in Java’s technology and techniques have made it a predominant platform in low latency applications (Lawrey et al., 2013). Java and other managed runtimes have been widely used in production for a number of significant application areas, including financial trading, telecommunications, and military command-and-control (Auerbach et al., 2008). Companies find Java attractive due to vast array of libraries, frameworks, tools, IDEs, and server providers; and it runs on a variety of platforms and CPU architectures.

JVM is the code execution component of the Java platform. The specification dictates that any JVM implementation must include the automatic memory management service – known as GC. Java Memory Management (Reitbauer et al., 2011), with its built-in GC, allows developers to create new objects without worrying explicitly about the memory allocation and deallocation, because the garbage collector automatically reclaims memory for reuse. This enables faster development with less boilerplate code, while eliminating memory leaks and other memory-related problems. However, the behaviour and efficiency of a garbage collector can

heavily influence the performance and responsiveness of any application that relies on it.

Given this link between GC and latency, it would be beneficial to quickly explore the influence of a GC-indicated allocation problem on latency in a real trading system, since time is money in the exchange business. However, examining the text in the massive data files produced by the GC and latency logging outputs can be a daunting task for engineers. What is needed is a powerful, effective graphical presentation of those data, since graphs can convey such time-series information more quickly and more informatively than just text to the human operator.

In this paper we present the design of Garbage Collection vs. Latency Visualization [GCLViz], a user interactive visualization tool that turns both GC and latency logging outputs into x/y time-series line plots, bar charts, and other unique types of graph, including a time-overlap-view and a correlation-circle-view. GCLViz allows the user to load the raw GC and latency logs directly into its application which does all the processing behind the scenes. GCLViz enables users to explore large collections of GC and latency events, easily identify interesting events, and subsequently focusing on the relations and details of such events without losing the “big picture” (Sekhavat and Hoerber, 2013) perspective on the collection as a whole.

We first summarize related work in visualization of GC and system performance, and introduce the features of our data. We then describe the design of the GCLViz visualization in detail, followed by conclusions and future work.

## 2 RELATED WORK

In recent years, there have been a large number of real-time dynamic visualizations for software systems (Reiss 2003). Perhaps the most prominent effort is IBM’s Jinsight (De Pauw et al., 2001). Jinsight typically operates by collecting detailed trace data as the target program executes and when execution is complete, it uses a variety of views based on the trace, to allow the programmer to understand execution at a very detailed level. JConsole (Java SE Monitoring and Management Guide, Using JConsole, n.d.) is a graphical monitoring tool to monitor JVM and java applications. JConsole provides information on performance and resource consumption of applications running on the Java platform using Java Management Extensions (JMX) technology. LagAlyzer (Adamoli et al., 2010) is a tool to analyze

and visualize the information of traces produced by other latency measurement tools. LagAlyzer is an offline tool: it requires the completed traces to exit before it can start to analyze and visualize them. Lila Viewer (Adamoli et al., 2010) is also a visualization tool that draws trace timelines showing the start and end of each interactive request. To visualize the distribution of latencies over time, Analytics (Gregg, 2010) used a heat map created with time on the x-axis and latency on the y-axis. The heat map is a colour-shaded matrix of pixels, where each pixel represents a particular time and latency range.

In addition to visualizing software performance, there are numerous packages involved in the visualization or interpretation of garbage collection data. GCViewer (Schreiber, 2002) is a small tool that visualizes verbose GC output generated by Sun/Oracle, IBM, and BEA Java Virtual Machines. It also calculates garbage collection related performance metrics (throughput, accumulated pauses, longest pause, etc.). HPjmeter (Tool Report: HPjmeter, 2002) is designed to display the collected metrics to allow the user to easily identify performance bottlenecks and quickly tune the Java applications. The IBM Monitoring and Diagnostic Tools for Java – Garbage Collection and Memory Visualizer (GCMV) (n.d.) is a tool which allows the user to visualize and analyze the memory usage and garbage collection activity of the Java application. Due to the nature of those tools, this kind of analysis can only be performed by a small group of expert users that have high technical skills. To allow a wider range of testers to carry out expert analysis, GcLite (Angelopoulos et al., 2012) tool has been created for analyzing garbage collection logs.

While the tools mentioned above work well as far as they go, we believe there is still a need for new designs and techniques. For example, we have other requirements to consider and therefore conclude that none of the existing tools met our needs. To the point, visualization of the impacts of GCs on latency is needed, and techniques for incorporating analytical tools within the simplified domain of end-user visualization would prove useful. GCLViz can help engineers establish or refute a correlation between time-of-day-based observed latency and JVM-wide GC behaviour. Our visualization helps one to quickly understand the impact a GC-related change on latency.

### 3 DATA

#### 3.1 Garbage Collection Output

In our study, the GC log is the standard output form (Figure 1) for Oracle JVM. Standard Oracle JVM 1.7.0\_25 64-bit was used on servers with Intel CPUs running Linux operating system. Standard options for reporting details of each garbage collections were used. The default garbage collector on this platform is Parallel Collector (Garbage Collector Ergonomics, n.d.), which is what was used to run the simulations. Detailed description of the operation of this garbage collector is beyond the scope of this paper, but is readily available from Oracle as well as descriptions of other available collectors.

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2013-09-11T17:01:27.705-0500: 911.326: [gc
Desired survivor size 524288 bytes, new threshold 1 (max 3)
[PSYoungGen: 13024K->416K(13120K)] 354401K->342033K(355136K),
0.0026540 secs] [Times: user=0.03 sys=0.00, real=0.00 secs]
2013-09-11T17:01:28.351-0500: 911.972: [gc
Desired survivor size 524288 bytes, new threshold 1 (max 3)
[PSYoungGen: 13014K->416K(13120K)] 354631K->342297K(355136K),
0.0026540 secs] [Times: user=0.02 sys=0.00, real=0.00 secs]
2013-09-11T17:01:28.354-0500: 911.975: [Full GC (PSYoungGen:
416K->0K(13120K)) (ParOldGen: 341881K->117748K(240512K))
342297K->117748K(253632K) [PSPermGen: 22296K->22194K(44544K)],
0.2473970 secs] [Times: user=1.38 sys=0.00, real=0.25 secs]
VM-Thread 911975195 912079039 912222583
    Date      Time it took  Time
  
```

Figure 1: Garbage Collection logging output.

In this paper, we only consider minor collections for young generations. The critical attributes of GC logging output are the collection time when GC happens – known as GC event time, and the duration GC lasts – known as GC event duration. GC event time includes the year, month, day, hour, minute, second, and millisecond. GC event duration is the time period in millisecond.

#### 3.2 Latency Output

In trading-systems, latency is defined as the time the exchange takes to react to the market. In general, latency measures the delay between an action and a response. Like GC log, the most useful attributes of latency logging output are latency event ID, latency event time, and latency event duration. Each latency event has a specific event ID. Latency event time and duration have the same format as GC.

#### 3.3 Simulation Data

To protect sensitive business operations, we used simulated data. Consequently, all the figures shown in this paper are generated using this simulated data. For the purposes of demonstrating the impact of GC on application performance in terms of latency, we

have chosen to use Jetty (n.d.) web application server as the server component. It was chosen mainly due to its good performance characteristics as well as ease of configuration. We create a custom client using Java, which would retrieve JSP page rendering the HTTP request from the server.

While dynamics of a web application server is quite different from a matching engine of an exchange, the fundamental approach of operation is the same as that of exchange. The request is received over the network connection, acted upon by the server, and then a response is sent to the user. For vast majority of Java applications the processing stage will result in memory allocations, which will lead to garbage collection. Our goal is to examine the impact of those GCs on latency of responses to requests that were made at that time.

Latency was measured by the client application with nanosecond precision and each observation was recorded for analysis.

### 4 VISUALIZATION DESIGN

By presenting a large number of GC and latency events in a single view, it is not easy for users to recognize the relations between GCs and latencies. We design GCLViz to follow Shneiderman’s visual Information Seeking Mantra: “overview first, zoom and filter, then details-on-demand” (Shneiderman, 1999). In other words, in the exploratory data analysis (EDA) of a data set, an analyst first obtains an overview. This may reveal potentially interesting patterns or certain subsets of the data that deserve further investigation. The analyst then focuses on one or more of these, inspecting the details of the data. The goal of GCLViz is to provide an effective visual representation that scales well with a large number of events and allows the user to explore the relation between GC and latency at a micro-level.

#### 4.1 Overview

The three main synchronized parts of GCLViz, shown in Figure 2, are the global-view, detail views and a table-based view. The global-view provides an overview of all of the events. The detail views which includes a time-overlap-view, a correlation-circle-view and scatter plots, shows the subset of events selected from the global-view, clearly illustrating the relationships between GC and latency. Interesting events can be accessed through the table-based view and highlighted within the global and detail views.

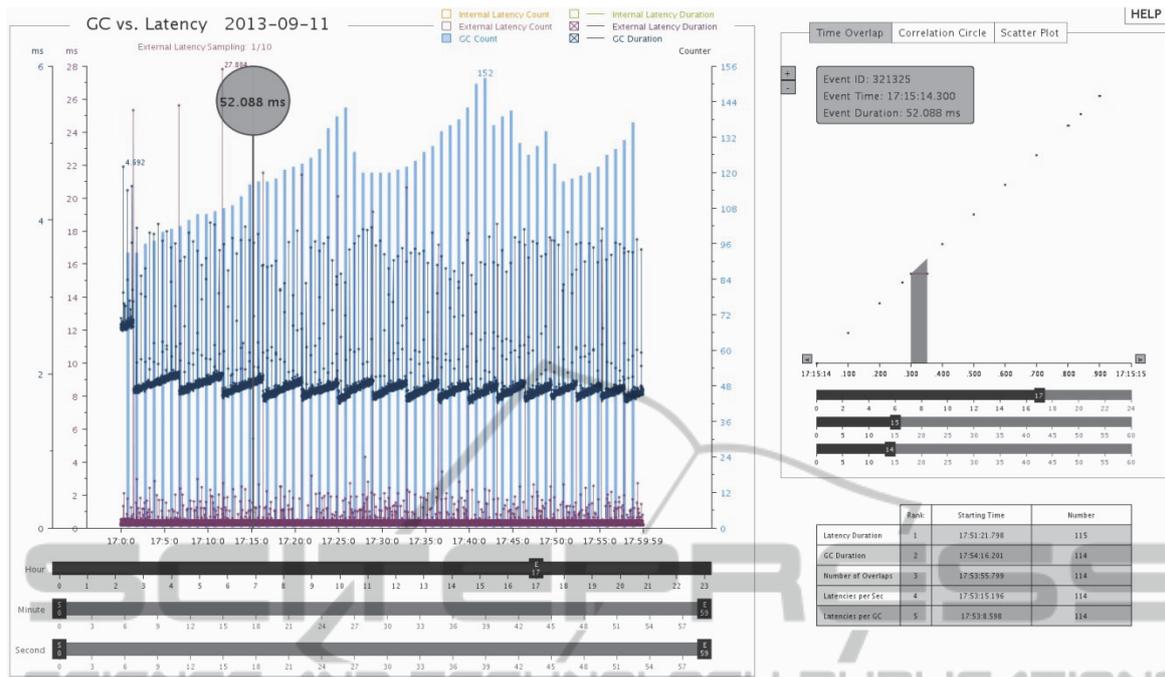


Figure 2: A screenshot of the GCLViz system. The global-view of the entire set of events on the left, the detail views, including time overlap, correlation circle and scatter plot, of the events related to a selection of items on the right, and a table-based view of interesting events on the bottom-right.

## 4.2 Global-view

The global-view in GCLViz is a 2D graph representation for time series data with line graphs and bar charts that provides a “big picture” (Sekhavat and Hoerber, 2013) overview of both GC and latency events and allows users to identify interesting aspects within data. Multiple line graphs or bar charts can be used or overlaid to show more than two dimensions (x, y1, y2 ...) (Kromesch and Juhász, n.d.). In GCLViz, we use different colour coding to distinguish each dimension. Each dimension may be drawn using a different scale.

In global-view, there are seven dimensions: x value always represents time variable, while six y values are used to represent internal latency duration, internal latency count (frequency of occurrence), external latency duration, external latency count, GC duration, and GC count. We use three sets of channels: Yellow-green series are used for encoding internal latency events, pink series are used for external latency events, and blue series are used for GC events. Dots represent GC and latency events. Line graphs show the “event duration” while bar charts present the “event count” over entire timeline (24 hours). In addition, due to the large size of the external latency data (about 200 events in a second), the original data is down-sampled by a

factor of 10 when time period on the x-axis is larger than one minute.

**Interaction.** Interaction is an important element in any visualization system. Providing an interaction for users to explore the data helps them to perceive the relations within data. In GCLViz, basic interaction is done with simple mouse and keyboard operations. Users can select an event they wish to investigate further by clicking on the data displayed in the global-view.

When users select a specific data point in the global-view, the corresponding event is highlighted by a semi-transparent grey bar with a circle displaying the event duration. Both the time-overlap-view and correlation-circle-view are updated to reflect the corresponding time when the event happens, and the details that are related to that event are shown in the information panel in the time-overlap-view, as illustrated in Figure 2. Manual zooming is performed by dragging the time sliders of hour, minute, and second at the bottom of the graphs. Figure 2 displays the graphs during the time from 17:00 to 17:59:59. User can also enable or hide any one or multiple graphs by checking or unchecking the checkboxes on the top of the global-view. For example, Figure 2 only shows the graphs

of external latency duration, GC duration and GC count.

### 4.3 Time-overlap-View

Once users select events from the global-view that they deem important, they can further explore the relationships among these events, such as the latency related to a specific GC and inspect details of selected events, with the time-overlap-view. In the time-overlap-view, we use both X-axis and Y-axis to represent time and duration as well. All the events start on the line where  $y = x$ , and end at the point  $(x + d, x)$ , where  $d$  is the event duration. The durations of events are drawn along x-axis by using the lines with same color-code as the one in the global-view. The end points of events are drawn by using dots. Where the global-view displays the performance over a twenty-four hour period; the time-overlap-view provides a snapshot over a second as default. This view can be magnified 1000 times to one millisecond.

Figure 3 shows the time-overlap-view expanded to 30 milliseconds after the user clicks an event in the global-view. The chosen event is highlighted with its detail information displayed in the information panel. We can obviously see that most of the events of external latency coloured with pink that concentrate on the diagonal line have very short durations (within nanoseconds). The only long external latency starts at 9:3:42:931 and lasts 5.15 milliseconds. It happens right before a GC event coloured with blue. This figure strongly demonstrates the impact of GC on latency.

**Interaction.** Clicking a data point causes the corresponding event to be highlighted with a semi-transparent grey bar consisting of a rectangle topped by a triangle. It highlights all the events that overlap with the event selected. Meanwhile, the information panel at the top-left of the time-overlap-view displays the detail information of the chosen event, including event ID, event starting time and event duration. The user can look into the event in other relative log files according to the event ID.

Pressing “+/-” keys on the keyboard will zoom in/out. The starting point of the chosen event is always centred in the time-overlap-view. It is possible that the user cannot see the complete event when the duration is longer than half of the time period of current view. The “arrow” buttons on both sides of the x-axis are used for shifting the whole overlap view one millisecond forward or backward to place the chosen event in a proper location. As the

time sliders in the global-view, the time sliders here can allow the users to make the time-overlap-view jump to a particular time point directly by dragging them to that time.

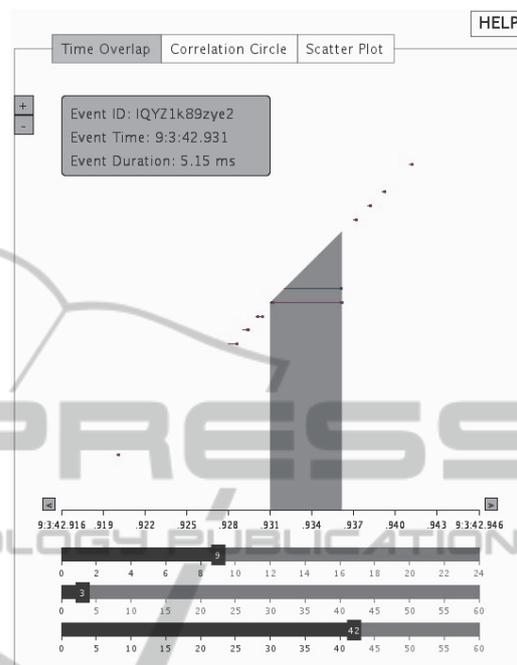


Figure 3: Time-overlap-view when zooming in.

### 4.4 Correlation-Circle-View

The correlation-circle-view borrows the idea of Circle View (Keim, 2004) technique, which is a combination of hierarchical visualization techniques (Shneiderman, 1992), such as tree maps and circular layout techniques (Ankerst, 1996), such as Pie Charts and Circle Segments. The main goal is to compare continuous data over time in a limited display space, in order to identify patterns, exceptions and similarities in the data. The basic idea of the correlation-circle-view display is to visualize the change of correlation between GC count and latency count over time.

We have two ways of counting the events: counts per minute and counts per second. In this paper, we only discuss the case when the events are counted per second. For example, we have sixty samples for one minute of data. We applied Pearson's correlation coefficient to the pair of the series of numbers. The window size (length of time) for calculating the linear correlation coefficient is set to 40 seconds as default. The correlations are calculated from the beginning of both events of latency and GC then shifted one second for each step

over the entire timeline to generate a correlation coefficient value. To display a series of correlation coefficient values over time in a limited display space and provide users an effective view to observe how the event count changes in a minute or hour, we choose the circle view.

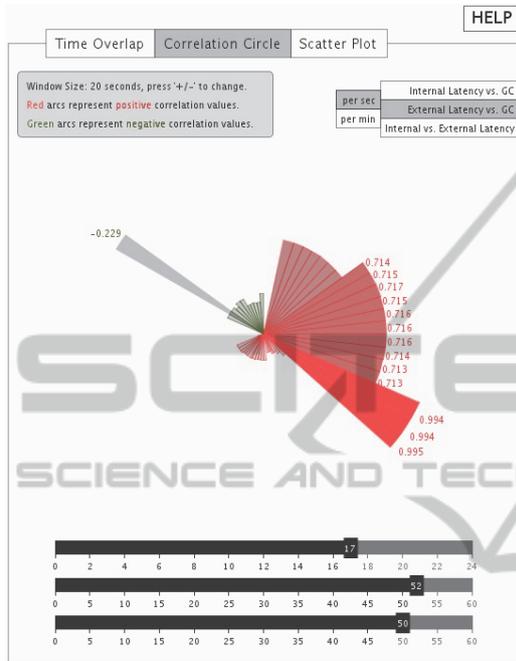


Figure 4: Correlation-circle-view.

Figure 4 shows an example structure of a single circle view dividing a circle in 60 segments. Each segment represents a correlation coefficient value. Both the lengths of fans and opacity factors are determined by the correlation coefficient values. Red fans represent positive correlation values, while green ones represent negative correlations. For example, Figure 4 shows the change of correlation between GC count and latency count during the 53<sup>rd</sup> minute at 5 pm with window size of 20 seconds. The highlighting green fan presents that the correlation value for the series of event count starting from 17:52:50 to 17:53:10 is -0.229.

From a perceptual point of view, it is easier to compare segments, which are located very close to each other. The eye of the data analyst can directly compare neighbouring time slots or even unconnected time slots.

**Interaction.** The arcs of segments can be investigated as well. For example, clicking the 21<sup>st</sup> segment in Figure 5 causes it to be highlighted by a semi-transparent grey fan with the time sliders

jumping to 17:52:21. Dragging the minute time slider also causes the circle view to be updated to the corresponding minute. The visualization works for different window sizes by pressing “+/-” key. In Figure 4 and 5, the window size is decreased to 20 seconds from the default value (40 seconds) by the user. The correlation-circle-view must be updated each time new parameter values are assigned. In addition, other views are updated as well. A semi-transparent red bar is drawn at 17:52:21 with the width of window size (20 seconds) in the global-view (Figure 5). The time period for displaying in the time-overlap-view is updated to from 17:52:21 to 17:52:22.



Figure 5: A correlation coefficient value in the Correlation-circle-view and its relative position in the Global-view.

#### 4.5 Scatter Plot

The scatter plot is another kind of correlation. The more the data sets agree, the more the data tend to concentrate in the vicinity of the identity line. Each semi-transparent yellow dot represents a particular period of one second. Figure 6 presents 3600 dots for the period from 5 pm to 6 pm. During the period of one second, we count the number of events and calculate the average and maximum duration of events.

A Grid of two-dimensional scatterplots is the standard way of extending the scatter plot to higher dimensions (Kromesch and Juhász, n.d.). Since each data set has three dimensional data, a three by three array of scatter plots is used to provide a visualization of each dimension versus every other dimension. This is useful for looking at all possible two-way interactions or correlations between dimensions. The nine scatter plots are GC count vs. latency count, GC count vs. latency Avg duration, GC count vs. latency Max duration, GC Avg duration vs. latency count, GC Avg duration vs. latency Avg duration, GC Avg duration vs. latency Max duration, and GC Max duration vs. latency

count, GC Max duration vs. latency Avg duration, GC Max duration vs. latency Max duration. There are three by three rectangles in a table for the users to select one of nine scatter plots by pressing the left mouse button inside of the corresponding rectangle. Figure 6 shows the relation between GC average duration and latency average duration in every second.

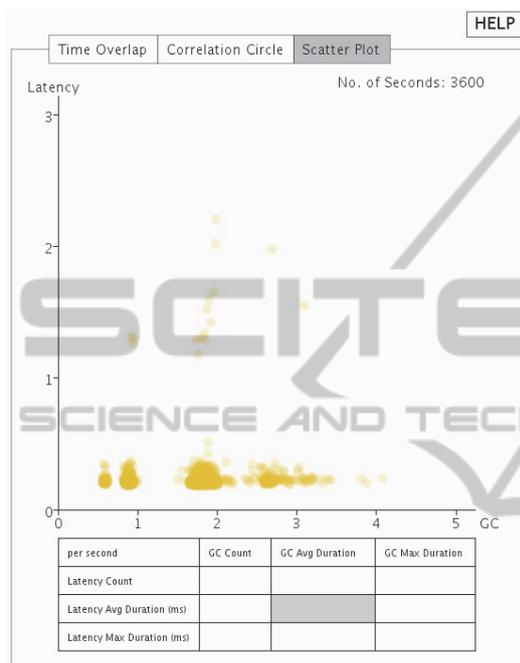


Figure 6: One of the nice Scatter Plots.

	Rank	Starting Time	Number
Latency Duration	1	17:51:21.798	115
GC Duration	2	17:54:16.201	114
Number of Overlaps	3	17:53:55.799	114
Latencies per Sec	4	17:53:15.196	114
Latencies per GC	5	17:53:8.598	114

Figure 7: Table-based View.

#### 4.6 Table-based View

The table-based view (Sekhavat and Hoerber, 2013) is useful for users to find interesting events. By comparing GC and latency events, the table provides top five interesting events for each of the five categories: Latency Duration, GC Duration, Number of Overlaps between GCs and Latencies, Number of Latencies per Second, and Number of Latencies per GC. Figure 7 indicates top five GC events with largest number of latencies between them and the following GCs. The table-based view is clickable.

All the views will be updated when users click the event time in the table.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper we propose a new technique for the visualization of GC vs. Latency. The goal of GCLViz is to build a visualization system for the exploration and analysis of the impact of GC on latency and variability. Using simulated data rather than actual data from the exchange company to protect sensitive business operations, we demonstrate that GCLViz does provide important visualizations to show GC impacts on latencies. The most important value of GCLViz is in its ability to provide engineers information that can be used to control and minimize the effects of GCs impacts on system performance.

GCLViz was designed to follow Shneiderman’s visual information seeking mantra of “overview first, zoom and filter, then details on demand”. GCLViz presents the GC and latency in multiple synchronized views. The scale of displayed information and layout were chosen to support observed behaviour and allow users to expand visualized data at a micro-level in detail views including the time-overlap-view, the correlation-circle-view and the scatter plots, that illustrate relationships and further details on a subset of the events, while still providing the relative position of the subset of events in an overview. Interactive highlighting makes exploring the events selected in different views an effortless process. Finally, the table-based view consisting of “interesting events” is provided to help users find critical events quickly.

While there are a great number of sophisticated tools available that focus on visualizing GC or system performance, GCLViz offers two main advantages over other tools in the field. It builds the connections between GC and latency allowing users to explore relationships between them; it develops a 2D time-overlap-view for visualizing data of which both dimensions are time variables.

In the future, it would be very meaningful to explore the behaviours of GCs by using different type of collectors and compare their impacts on latency. Besides the default garbage collector (Parallel Collector) we use in our current method, there are three additional collectors (Java SE 6 HotSpot Virtual Machine Garbage Collection Tuning, n.d.): Serial Collector, Concurrent Collector, and Garbage-First Collector. Each of

them is a generational collector which has been implemented to emphasize the throughput of the application or low garbage collection pause times. In addition, there are different kinds of measurement of latency as well. Visualizing multiple data sets in the same view can be a big challenge just like visualizing high dimensional data. We need to develop more efficient visual layouts for visualizing the large-scale time-based data. Finally, we plan to integrate the data online searching into this application tool rather than analysing the local data offline, so that the visualization can be implemented in real-time.

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