Installer Observer

Find out all the dirty things that installers and other programs do behind your back.

Installer Observer 3.0.3 Manual 🐈

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Introduction

What is Installer Observer?

Installer Observer is a program designed to aid a user in determining exactly what an installer has done to his or her computer. Installer Observer can discover all changes that an installer has made by essentially comparing *before* and *after* states of the system. From this comparison, Installer Observer locates all files that have been added, changed, or removed, and presents them to the user in a neat, comprehensible format.

How is this useful?

Installer Observer gives the user far more control over the files on his or her computer by allowing him or her to see all changes—relevant and irrelevant—that a program makes to those files. Because Installer Observer scans the system independently of the program that made the changes, it can be used to detect changes made not only by installers, but by suspicious programs, trojan horses, viruses, and even other users. Furthermore, with Installer Observer's powerful features, the user will never be at loss when dealing with those changes. Several applications for Installer Observer include

- Ensuring that a computer system remains stable
- Quick and efficient system maintenance
- A virus checker
- Heightened computer security
- Detecting unauthorized usage of a computer

Requirements

Hardware

- 68K or PowerPC™ processor; G3 or G4 for best results.
- 5 megabytes of RAM minimum; 12 megabytes to scan 60,000 files and folders.
- At least 2 megabytes of free hard disk space.
- Color display capable of at least 640 x 480 resolution.

Software

- Mac OS 8.1

Features

Folder Sets

When Installer Observer saves the current conditions of the system, it looks inside folders in a specific "folder set." A folder set is simply a list of folders that Installer Observer can scan. Installer Observer comes with three predefined folder sets: "Entire Hard Disk," "Entire System Folder," and "Quick Folder Set." You can manage folder sets from the "Folder Sets" menu:

Figure 1: The Folder Sets menu
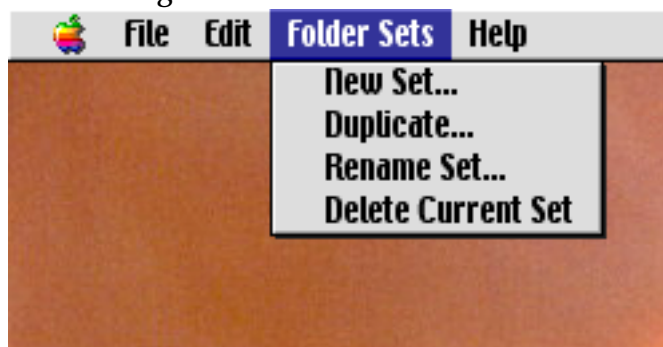
The contents of the current folder set is displayed in the main Installer Observer window:

Figure 2: The contents of the "Entire System Folder" folder set
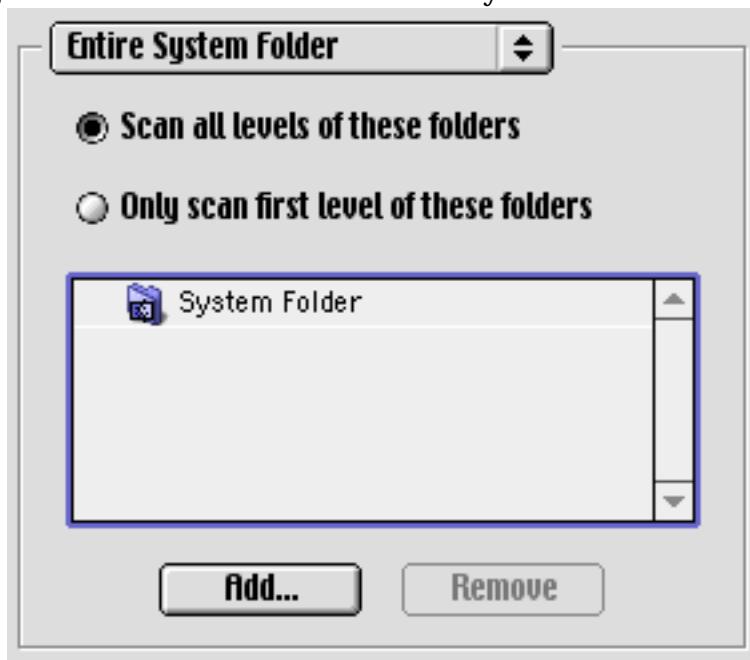
To add a folder to the current folder set, either click the "Add..." button and select the folder in a dialog window, or drag a folder from the Finder onto

the box displaying the folder set's contents. To "reveal" the original folder's location in the Finder, simply double-click on that folder's name in the list.

To scan all levels of all folders within a folder set, click the "Scan all levels of these folders" radio button. When this option is on, Installer Observer will scan within <u>all</u> subfolders contained within the folders listed below. When Installer Observer is set to "Only Scan first level of these folders," it will not scan any of the subfolders within the listed folders—only the listed folders themselves will be scanned.

Scanning and Examining

Scanning is what Installer Observer does when it saves the initial conditions of files within the current folder set. *Examining* is what it does when it looks for changes within the saved conditions and the current conditions of the system. Before running an installer, you should click the "Save Conditions" button in Installer Observer and then select a directory in which to save the conditions. Then, after the installer has finished, open up Installer Observer, click the "Examine Changes" button, and select the file containing the conditions that you saved.

Figure 3: The "Save Conditions" and "Examine Changes" buttons
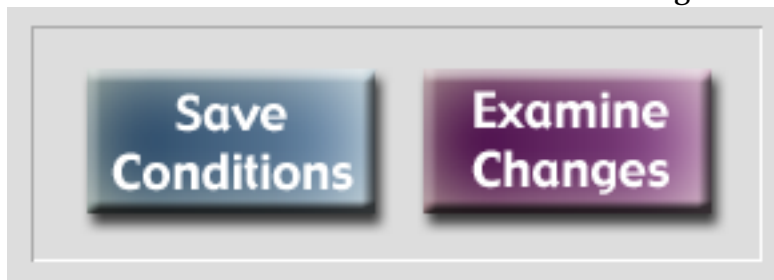
Installer Observer will list ALL files that have been added, removed, or changed within the folders whose conditions were stored within the Saved System State file, regardless of visibility and other factors. The only files that Installer Observer won't report are those on the File or Folder Exclusions list, but that will be discussed in a later section.

Observations

When Installer Observer has finished examining a "Saved System State" file, you will be presented with a window similar to this one:

Figure 4: The Observations window
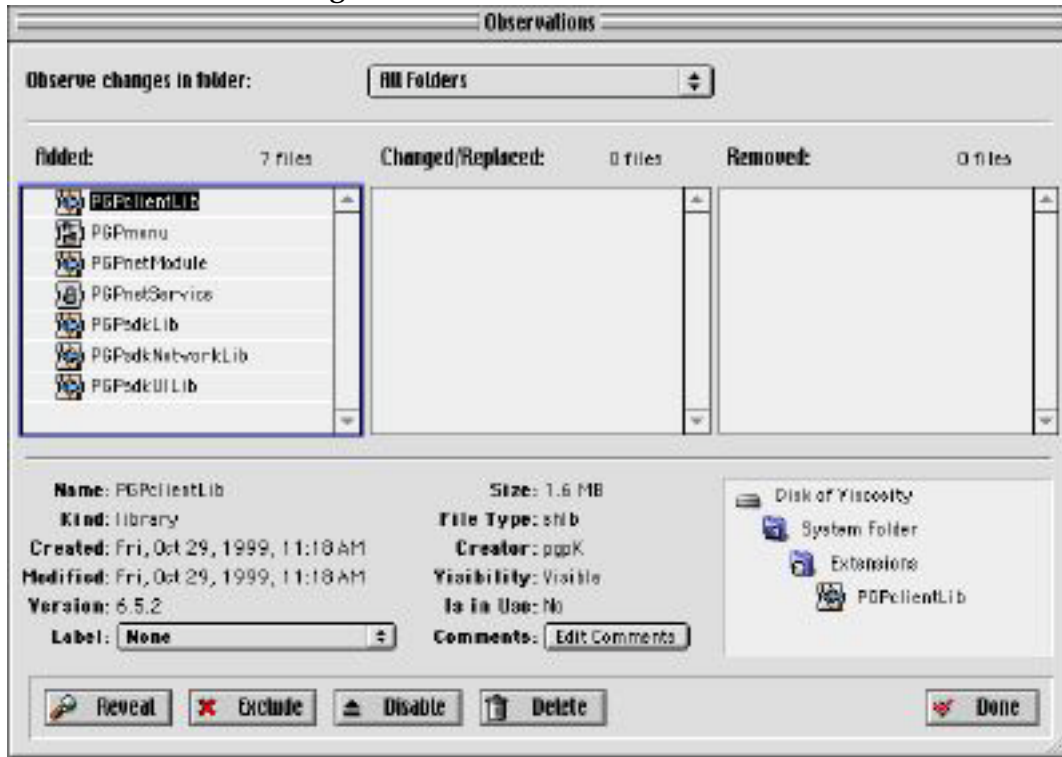
The functions of the buttons at the bottom of the window are as follows:

Reveal Shows the selected file(s) or folder(s) in the Finder.

Exclude Adds the selected file(s) or folder(s) to the file or folder exclusions list.

Disable Moves the selected file(s) or folder(s) to the corresponding "Disabled" folder. Enabled only for files in the Extensions, Control Panels, or System Folder.

Delete Moves the selected file(s) or folder(s) to the Trash.

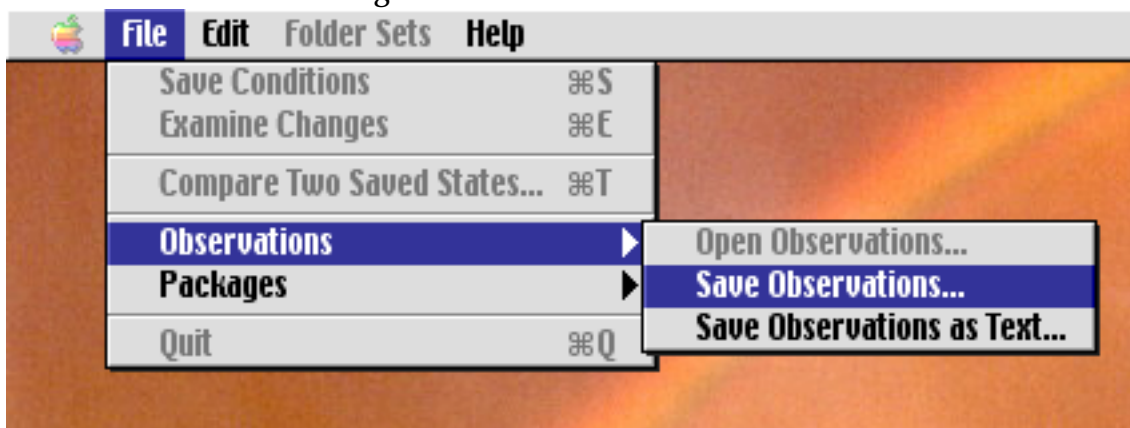**Done** Closes the Observations window.

The popup menu at the top of the Observations window lists all folders in which files have been added, changed, or removed. Selecting a folder from this menu causes the Observations window to display the modified files inside that folder only. Selecting "All Folders" causes the Observations window to display all added/changed/removed files at once.

Figure 5: The "Observe changes in folder" popup menu
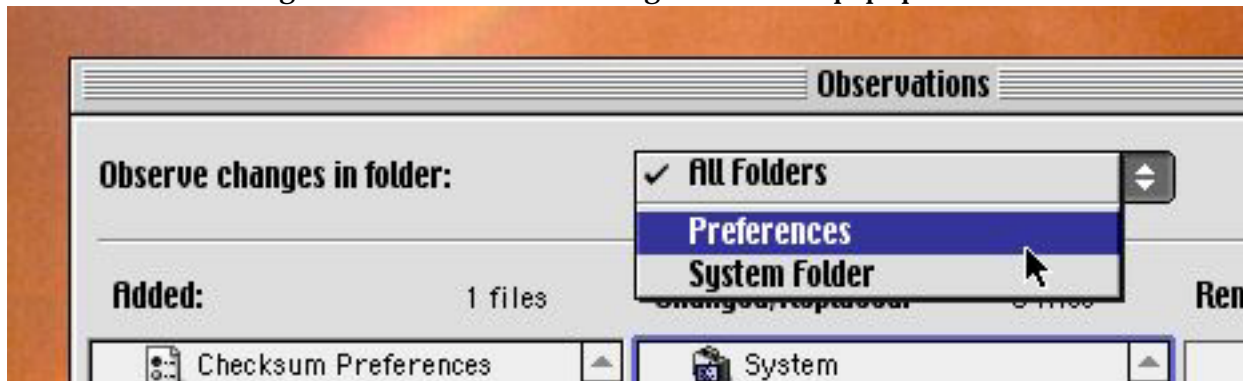
When the Observations window is open, you also have the option of saving Installer Observer's observations to a file for viewing at a later date:

Figure 6: The Observations menu

When you open a saved observations file, the contents are displayed in the Observations window in exactly the same way as when Installer Observer displayed them for the first time. Saving the observations as a text file will allow you to open them up in standard text-editing programs such as SimpleText™ and BBEdit™.

Packages

A "Package" in Installer Observer is essentially a method by which an installation can be duplicated. A package created from a set of observations on one computer can be applied through Installer Observer to recreate the same conditions on another computer. Users of Installer Observer who wish to combine several small installations into one larger installation may find this feature useful.

Figure 7: The Packages menu

However, you are not limited by Installer Observer's observations when creating a package; you may add and remove files, change the directories into which files are to be installed, and set the context in which they should be installed.

To add a file that is to be installed by the package, click the "Add File…" button and select the file in a dialog box, or drag the file from the Finder into the "Create Installation Package" window. Dragging a folder into this window will cause all the files inside it to be added. The default directory into which a file is to be installed will be set to that file's current location. To change the directory into which a file is to be installed, click the directory viewing area and select another folder on your hard drive. During installation, that directory will be created (if it does not already exist) on the target computer.

There are three options that can be set for installing a file if it already exists:

> • Overwrite file no matter what: The file will be overwritten, regardless of its age.
> • Don't overwrite file if it is newer: The file will only be overwritten if it is older than the file to be installed.
> • Don't overwrite file: No changes will be made if the file already exists.

Figure 8: The package creation window.
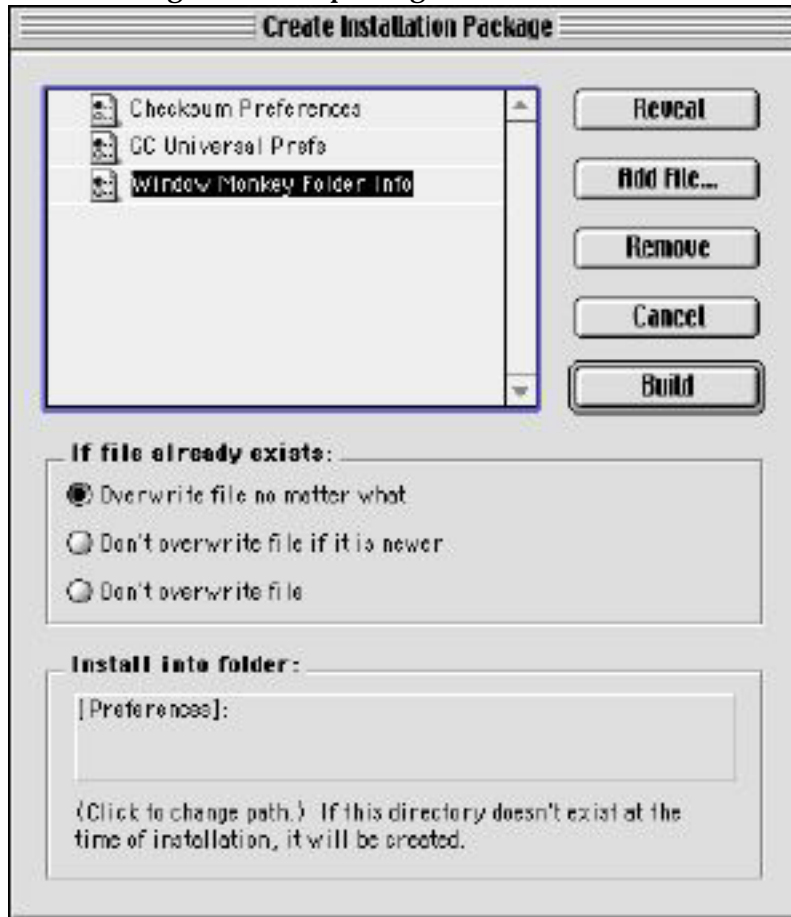
To reveal the actual file that is to be built into the package, double click it in the files list.

Files will be built into the package with the data and conditions that they possessed at the time of the creation of the package.

Note: When installing a package, be sure that there is enough disk space available to duplicate the package once.

Exclusions

Installer Observer also gives you the option to exclude either specific files or all the files inside a folder when looking for changes in the system. You can exclude files and folders in the preferences window:

Figure 9: File and folder exclusions.
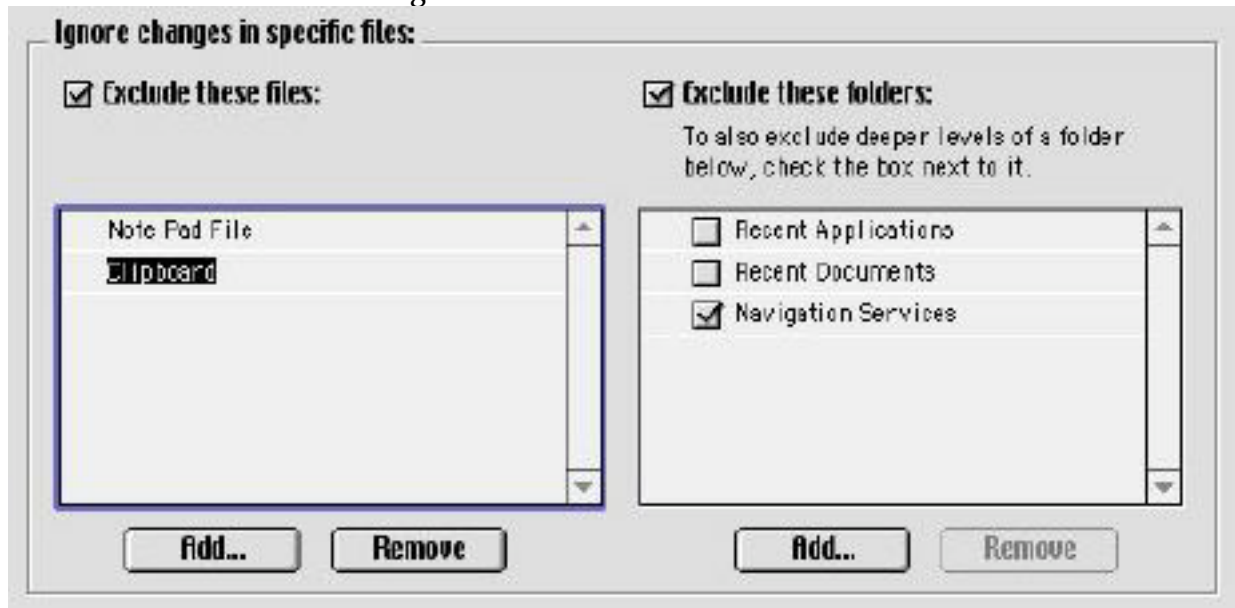
Files on the file exclusions list (the left box) will not be listed in the Observations window if Installer Observer has found changes within them. However, they will be listed if they have been added or removed.

Folders on the folder exclusions list (the right box) will not be examined at all by Installer Observer. Thus, files that have been added to, changed in, or removed from these folders will not show up in the Observations window. If the box next to the folder is checked, the folder will be recursively excluded. In other words, all subfolders within that folder will be excluded as well.

To add a file or a folder to the file or folder exclusions list, click the "Add…" button under the corresponding box or drag the file or folder to the corresponding box from the Finder.

To reveal an excluded file or folder in the Finder, simply double-click it.

Comparing Two Saved System States

Ordinarily, Installer Observer is used to compare a saved system state with the current state of the system. However, if you have two saved system states that were created from the same folder set, you can compare them with each other using this same principle. Installer Observer will report differences between two system states in exactly the same way that it reports changes within the current system.

Figure 10: The "Compare Two Saved States" command.
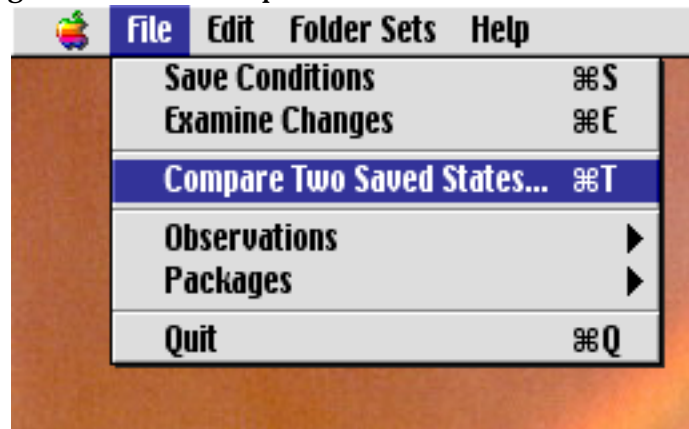
After choosing "Compare Two Saved States..." from the File menu, you will be prompted to choose two different saved states to be compared. In the first dialog box, choose the older state. In the second, choose the newer one. Installer Observer will do the rest.

> Note: The two saved states that you choose must be created from a folder set containing the same folders with the same setting for whether or not to scan them recursively.

Troubleshooting

Common Problems

✍ **I ran an installer, created a saved state, and then examined it, but Installer Observer says that there aren't any changes!**

Of course there aren't any changes. You're supposed to save the state BEFORE you run the installer.

✍ **Files that I have labeled before an install now have no label at all. Thus, they must have been changed, yet Installer Observer doesn't report them in the "changed/replaced" list.**

Installer Observer does not report files as being changed if they are the same in every way except for their label.

✍ **Installer Observer isn't reporting any changes within a certain folder.**

There are three reasons as to why this might occur: First of all, that folder might be on the folder exclusions list. Second, it might be contained within a folder on the folder exclusions list that is set to be recursively excluded. Third, that folder's conditions might not have been saved within the saved system state file because it was either not explicitly specified in the folder set or because it was not contained within a folder that was set to be recursively scanned.

✍ **Nothing happens when I click the "Save Conditions" button and the "Save Conditions…" choice in the File menu is grayed out.**

Either there aren't any folders in the current folder set or none of the folders listed in it currently exist.

✍ **When I try to save the conditions of my system with Installer Observer, it says "Scanning and storing folder conditions," but nothing happens and I have to force-quit.**

If Installer Observer takes longer than five minutes to scan a folder set, it has probably frozen. However, while scanning entire hard disks on very slow computers may cause Installer Observer to approach this time limit, it is always best to be patient while Installer Observer accomplishes any task.

Error Messages

🐝 **The message begins with "Installer Observer Flaw."**

There was a flaw in Installer Observer. Contact the programmer telling him exactly what was happening before the error message appeared.

🐝 **The message begins with "Misbehavior."**

Bad boy! Read the instructions in the message so you can learn from your mistakes!

🐝 **The message begins with "Dilemma."**

The problem is not major and can be solved by understanding the rest of the error message.

🐝 **While scanning a folder set, Installer Observer quits with a message telling me that there isn't enough memory available.**

Get info on Installer Observer in the Finder and allocate a few more megabytes of RAM to it.

🐝 **Installer Observer quit for a reason not listed here.**

As before, contact the programmer telling him what you were doing at the time. Also, try giving the program more RAM.

<u>Distribution</u>

What You Must Do

Installer Observer may not be sold to anyone for any purpose without the author's explicit consent. However, Installer Observer may be freely distributed, provided that it is unaltered and that the "Read Me" file is included with it, also unaltered.

Contact Information

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Email: InstallerObserver@mac.com

Email me for the address and phone number of my current residence.

Official Installer Observer web site:

http://home.earthlink.net/~z41/io.html