

Generating Representative Executions

Extended Abstract

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Analyzing the behaviour of a concurrent program is made difficult by the number of possible executions. This problem can be alleviated by applying the theory of Mazurkiewicz traces to focus only on the canonical representatives of the equivalence classes of the possible executions of the program. This paper presents a generic framework that allows to specify the possible behaviours of the execution environment, and generate all Foata-normal executions of a program, for that environment, by discarding abnormal executions during the generation phase. The key ingredient of Mazurkiewicz trace theory, the dependency relation, is used in the framework in two roles: first, as part of the specification of which executions are allowed at all, and then as part of the normality checking algorithm, which is used to discard the abnormal executions. The framework is instantiated to the relaxed memory models of the SPARC hierarchy.

1 Introduction

Let us consider a fragment from Dekker’s mutual exclusion algorithm as an example.

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Init: $x = 0$; $y = 0$; | |
| P_1 | P_2 |
| (a) $[x] := 1$ | (c) $[y] := 1$ |
| (b) $r1 := [y]$ | (d) $r2 := [x]$ |
| Observed? $r1 = 0$; $r2 = 0$; | |

This is a concurrent program for two processors, P_1 and P_2 , where x is the flag variable for P_1 that is used to communicate that P_1 wants to enter the critical section and y is for P_2 . A processor may enter the critical section, if it has notified the other processor by setting its flag variable to 1, reading the flag variable of the other processor and checking that it is 0. We are interested in whether it is possible, starting from an initial state where both x and y are 0, that both processors see each others’ flag variables as 0, meaning that both processors enter the critical section. Here we are interested in the mutual exclusion property, that at most one processor can enter the critical section.

In the interleaving semantics of Sequential Consistency (SC), the above program can have the following executions: $abcd$, $cdab$, $acbd$, $cabd$, $acdb$, $cadb$. Out of these six, the four last executions are actually equivalent (in the sense that from the same initial state they will reach the same final state) and for our purposes it is enough to check the final state of only one of them. We can observe that the mutual exclusion property is satisfied. The situation is different, if we consider the possible executions on a real-world processor, like x86, which follows the Total Store Order (TSO) model [8]. Under TSO, it is possible for writes to be reordered with later reads from the same processor, resulting in an execution that is observable as $bdac$. This does not satisfy the mutual exclusion property.

In this paper, we seek to alleviate the difficulty analyzing the large numbers of executions concurrent programs, especially on relaxed memories, generate, by applying the theory of Mazurkiewicz traces to focus only on some type of canonical representatives of the equivalence classes of the possible executions of the program. We present a generic framework for interpreting concurrent programs under different

semantics, so that only executions in the Foata normal form (corresponding to maximal parallelism) are generated. We instantiate the framework to the relaxed memory models of the SPARC hierarchy. This work is in the vein of partial order reduction techniques for analysis of systems, which are widely used especially in model checking and have also been applied to relaxed memories, e.g., by Zhang et al. [13]. The novelties here are that the different memory models are modelled uniformly based on a flexible notion of a backlog of shadow events, using a standard normal form from trace theory, and using generalized traces (with a dynamic independency relation) to be able to define execution equivalence more finely, resulting in bigger and fewer equivalence classes. The framework has been prototyped in Haskell where one can easily separate the phases of generating the tree of symbolic executions of a program, discarding the abnormal executions, and running the tree of symbolic executions from an initial state. This separation can be made without a performance penalty thanks to lazy evaluation.

2 Mazurkiewicz Traces

An execution (or a run) of a sequential program can be represented as a sequence of symbols that record the events caused by the program in the order that they occurred. Such a sequence is a string over some (finite) alphabet Σ . An execution of a concurrent program can be represented as an interleaving of the executions on the processors involved, thereby reducing concurrency to non-deterministic choice. Mazurkiewicz traces [7] (or just traces) are a generalization of strings, where some of the letters in the string are allowed to commute. This allows representation of non-sequential behaviour. In other words, traces are equivalence classes of strings with respect to a congruence relation that allows to commute certain pairs of letters.

A dependency relation $D \subseteq \Sigma \times \Sigma$ is a reflexive and symmetric binary relation. $a D b$ if and only if the events a and b can be causally related, meaning that the two events cannot happen concurrently. The complement of the dependency relation, $I = (\Sigma \times \Sigma) \setminus D$, is called the independency relation. If $a I b$, then the strings $sabt$ and $sbat$ represent the same non-sequential behaviour. Two strings $s, t \in \Sigma^*$ are said to be Mazurkiewicz equivalent, $s \equiv_D t$, if and only if s can be transformed to t by a finite number of exchanges of adjacent, independent events. For example, if $\Sigma = \{a, b, c, d\}$ and $a I c$ and $b I d$ then the trace $acbd$ represents the strings $acbd, cabd, acdb$ and $cadb$.

For our purposes, standard Mazurkiewicz traces are not enough and therefore we turn to the generalized Mazurkiewicz traces of Sassone et al. [10]. In generalized Mazurkiewicz traces, the dependency relation is dynamic, it depends on the current context, which is the partial execution that has been performed so far. The dependency relation for a prefix s will be denoted by D_s and the subscript is omitted, if the relation is static. Besides D_s having to be reflexive and symmetric for any s , D must satisfy some sanity conditions. Most importantly, if $s \equiv_D t$, then it must be the case that $D_s = D_t$. In this setting, the strings $sabt$ and $sbat$ are considered equivalent, if $a I_s b$.

Normal Forms As traces are equivalence classes, it is reasonable to ask what the canonical representative or normal form of a trace is. There are two well-known normal forms for traces, the lexicographic and Foata [4] normal forms. We are going to look at Foata normal forms for our purposes.

A step is a subset $s \subseteq \Sigma$ of pairwise independent letters. The Foata normal form of a trace is a sequence $s_1 \dots s_k$ of steps such that the individual steps s_1, \dots, s_k are chosen from the left to the right with maximal cardinality. Since each step consists of independent letters, a step can be executed in parallel, meaning that the Foata normal form encodes a maximal parallel execution. For example, if $\Sigma = \{a, b, c, d\}$ and $a I c$ and $b I d$, then the Foata normal form of $acbd$ is $(ac)(bd)$.

We are interested in checking whether a given string is in normal form according to a given depen-

dependency relation. As a convenience, we also assume to have an ordering \prec on Σ that is total on events that are independent. A string is in Foata normal form, if it can be split into a sequence of steps s_1, \dots, s_k so that concatenation of the steps gives the original string and the following conditions are satisfied:

1. for every $a, b \in s_i$, if $a \neq b$ then $a I_i b$;
2. for every $b \in s_{i+1}$, there is an $a \in s_i$ such that $a D_i b$;
3. for every step s_i , the letters in it are in increasing order wrt. \prec .

In these definitions, we consider D_i to be the dependency relation for the context $s_0 \dots s_{i-1}$ and similarly for I_i . The first condition ensures that the events in a step can be executed in parallel. The second condition ensures that every event appears in the earliest possible step, i.e., maximal parallelism. The third condition picks a permutation of a step as a representative of the step. Notice that if a string is not in normal form, then neither is any string with that string as a prefix in normal form. This means that when checking a string for normality by scanning it from the left to the right, we can discard it as soon as we discover an abnormal prefix.

3 Framework

We now proceed to describing our framework for generating representative executions of a program and its instantiations to different memory models.

We are going to look at programs executing on a machine that consists of processors and a shared memory. Each processor also has access to a local memory (registers). The executions that we investigate are symbolic, in the sense that we do not look at the actual values propagating in the memory, but just the abstract actions being performed. Still, our goal is to find the possible final states of a program from a given initial state. The idea is that once the symbolic executions have been computed, the canonical executions can be picked and the final state needs to be computed only for those. This can be done lazily, meaning that the evaluation of a particular execution for the given initial state is cancelled immediately, if it is discovered that the execution is not normal.

The language for our system consists of arithmetic and boolean expressions and commands. An arithmetic expression is either a numeral value, a register, or an arithmetic operation. A boolean expression is either boolean constant, a boolean operation, or a comparison of arithmetic expressions. Commands consist of assignments to registers, loads and stores to shared memory, and *if* and *while* constructs.

Our framework is defined on top of the events generated by the system. We think of events as occurrences of (the phases of) the actions that executing the program can trigger. An event can be thought of as a record $(pid, eid, kind, act)$ where pid is the identifier of the processor that generated the event, eid is the processor-local identifier of the event, $kind$ defines whether it is a main or a shadow event, and act is the action performed in this event. An action can be an operation between registers, a load from or a store to a variable, or an assertion on registers. An assertion is used to record a decision made in the unfolding of a control structure of the program, for example, that a particular execution is one where the *true* branch of a conditional was taken. If an assertion fails when an execution is evaluated from a given initial state, then this execution is not valid for that initial state.

Since we are interested in modelling different memory models, our framework is parameterized by an architecture, which characterizes the behavioural aspects of the system. An architecture consists of four components. A predicate *shadows* describes whether an action is executed in a single stage or two stages, generating just one (main) event or two events (a main and a shadow event). An irreflexive-antisymmetric relation *sameDep* describes which events from a processor must happen before which other events from the same processor: it plays a role in determining the possible next events from this processor, but also

defines which events from it are dependent. A relation $diffDep$ describes when two events from different processors are dependent. Finally, a relation \prec orders independent events. The relations $sameDep$ (its reflexive-symmetric closure) and $diffDep$ together determine the dependency relation in the sense of Mazurkiewicz traces and \prec is the relation used to totally order the events within a step.

In the previous paragraph, we mentioned shadow events. These are the key ingredients of this framework for modelling more intricate behaviours, for example, when some actions are non-atomic and this fact needs to be reflected in the executions by two events, a main event and a shadow event. TSO, for example, can be described as a model where writes to memory first enter the processor's write-buffer and are later flushed from the write-buffer to memory. We consider the write to buffer to be the main event of the write action and the flush event to be the shadow event of the write action. Of these two events, the shadow event is globally observable.

Generating Normal Forms The process of generating normal-form executions of a program can be divided into two stages: lazily generating all executions of the program and then discarding those not in normal form.

The executions are generated as follows: if all processors have completed, then we have a complete execution and we are done, otherwise we pick a processor that has not yet completed and allow it to make a small step, then repeat the process. The local configuration of a processor consists of its residual program, backlog, and the value of a counter to provide identifiers for the generated events. The small step can either correspond to beginning the action of the next instruction according to the program—in which case a new main event is generated and added to the execution—or to completing an already started action—in this case, a shadow event is removed from the processor's backlog and added to the execution. If the step is to start a new action, then the *shadows* predicate is used to check whether a new shadow event should be added to the backlog (if not, the action is completed by the main event). A side-condition for adding a new main event is that there are no shadow events in the backlog that are dependent with it. An event can be removed from the backlog, if it is independent (according to $sameDep$) of all of the older events in the backlog. Conditionals like *if* and *while* are expanded to a choice between two programs, where the choices correspond to the branches of the conditional together with an assertion of the condition. The generation of executions is described by the small step rules in Appendix A.

The second stage of the procedure is to single out the normal forms among the generated executions. This is done by checking the normality of the executions according to the three conditions given in Section 2 for Foata normal forms. The rules for checking the normality of an execution by scanning it from the left to the right are given in Appendix A.

Instead of generating a flat set of executions in the first stage, we actually generate a tree of executions, so that the prefixes of executions are shared. Since the process of selecting the canonical executions (more precisely, discarding the non-canonical ones) according to the conditions of Foata normal forms can be fused into the generation stage, we can discard a whole set of executions when we discover that the current path down the tree violates the normality conditions. More precisely, walking down the tree, we keep track of the current prefix (which must be in normal form) and at each node we check whether the event associated with the node would violate the normality conditions when added to the prefix. Only if the normality condition is not violated does the subtree starting from that node need to be computed actually.

We require $sameDep\ a\ b$ to hold at least when a and b are main events and $eid\ a < eid\ b$ or when they are a main event and its shadow event (in which case they have the same eid). We also require that $sameDep\ a\ b$ can only hold when $eid\ a < eid\ b$ or when $eid\ a = eid\ b$ and a is a main event and b

the corresponding shadow event. Under these assumptions, we can prove that the total set of executions captured in the generated tree is closed under equivalence. As the normality checking stage keeps all normal forms and discards all non-normal forms, it follows that the pruned set of executions contains exactly one representative for every execution of the program.

In the introduction, we noted that our example program has six executions under interleaving semantics, of which four are equivalent. The executions are depicted in Figure 1 and the four equivalent executions $acbd$, $acdb$, $cabd$ and $cadb$ are the ones in the middle. For this program we have that $a I c$ and $b I d$. Our framework would only generate $acbd$ out of these four, as this corresponds to the Foata normal form $(ac)(bd)$ and the other three would be discarded. More precisely, $(ac)(d)$ is in normal form, but it cannot be extended by b , as neither $(ac)(db)$ nor $(ac)(d)(b)$ is in normal form: the first one fails due to condition 3 and the second one fails due to condition 2. The node b of this path is shaded in the picture to highlight the place where the normality condition is violated. For $cabd$, we start checking normality from (c) , which is valid, but neither (ca) nor $(c)(a)$ is in normal form and we can discard all executions that start with ca , which includes both $cabd$ and $cadb$. The subtree at node a is shaded to highlight this fact.

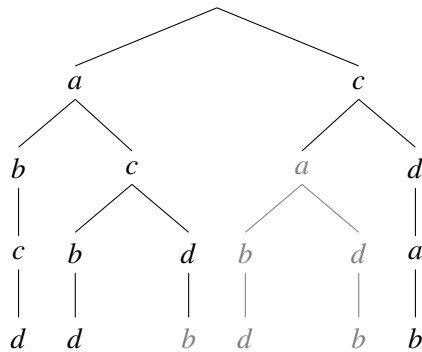


Figure 1: SC executions of the example program.

4 Instantiation to Relaxed Memory Models

Sequential Consistency In the Sequential Consistency (SC) model [6], any execution of a concurrent program is an interleaving of the program order executions of its component threads. SC can be specified as an architecture in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{shadows } a &= \text{false} \\
 \text{sameDep } a \ b &= \text{eid } a < \text{eid } b \\
 \text{diffDep } x \ y \ a \ b &= \text{crxw } a \ b \\
 a < b &= \text{pid } a < \text{pid } b
 \end{aligned}$$

$\text{crxw } a \ b$ represents the concurrent-read-exclusive-write property, which returns *true*, if events a and b access the same location and at least one of them is a write. diffDep also takes two arguments that are ignored here, which represent the backlogs of the two processors from which the events a and b originate from. This information can be recovered from the prefix of the execution and it is as much information

as we need about the prefix of the execution in the memory models we consider. We could also just take the prefix of the execution itself and compute the necessary information. Setting *shadows* to be always *false* means that all instructions execute atomically. Setting *sameDep a b* to require $eid\ a < eid\ b$ means that the events from the same processor must be generated in program order and cannot be reordered, which reflects the definition of SC.

Total Store Order In the Total Store Order (TSO) model [11], it is possible for a write action to be reordered with later reads, meaning that writes happen asynchronously, but at the same time the order of write actions is preserved. TSO can be specified in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned}
shadows\ a &= isWrite\ a \\
sameDep\ a\ b &= isMain\ a \wedge isMain\ b \wedge eid\ a < eid\ b \\
&\quad \vee isMain\ a \wedge isShadow\ b \wedge eid\ a == eid\ b \\
&\quad \vee isShadow\ a \wedge isShadow\ b \wedge eid\ a < eid\ b \\
diffDep\ x\ y\ a\ b &= crxw'\ x\ y\ a\ b \\
a < b &= pid\ a < pid\ b \vee pid\ a == pid\ b \wedge eid\ a < eid\ b
\end{aligned}$$

$crxw'$ is like $crxw$, except that it considers shadow write events instead of main write events as the global write events, and read events as global only if they access the memory. This is where we need generalized Mazurkiewicz traces, since if there is a pending write to the location of the read, then the read action would not read its value from memory and thus could not be dependent with events from other processors.

We consider the main event of a write instruction to be the write to buffer and the shadow event to be the flushing of the write from buffer to memory. TSO can be thought of as a model where every processor has a shadow processor and all events on every main processor are in program order, all of the events on the associated shadow processor are in program order and an event on the shadow processor must happen after the corresponding event on the main processor. Our example from introduction has the following traces in Foata normal form under TSO: $(ac)(a'c')(bd)$, $(ac)(a'b)(c'd)$, $(ac)(c'd)(a'b)$ and $(ac)(bd)(a'c')$ where a' stands for the shadow event of a . The last of these is the one rejected by SC.

Partial Store Order The Partial Store Order (PSO) model [11] allows the reorderings of TSO, but it is also possible for a write to be reordered with a later write to a different location. This can be thought of as having a separate write buffer for every variable. PSO can be specified as TSO with the exception of the *sameDep* relation:

$$\begin{aligned}
sameDep\ a\ b &= isMain\ a \wedge isMain\ b \wedge eid\ a < eid\ b \\
&\quad \vee isMain\ a \wedge isShadow\ b \wedge eid\ a == eid\ b \\
&\quad \vee isShadow\ a \wedge isShadow\ b \wedge eid\ a < eid\ b \wedge var\ a == var\ b
\end{aligned}$$

Intuitively, this corresponds to PSO, since it is like TSO except for the dependency relation on events from the same processor, where the shadow events are dependent only if they are to the same location, which allows one to reorder writes to different locations.

Relaxed Memory Order The Relaxed Memory Order [11] (RMO) model only enforces program order on write-write and read-write instruction pairs to the same variable and on instruction pairs in dependency, where the first instruction is a read. Dependency on instruction pairs here means that there is

data- or control-dependency between the instructions. We can specify RMO in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned}
& \text{shadows } a = \text{true} \\
& \text{sameDep } a \ b = \text{isMain } a \wedge \text{isMain } b \wedge \text{eid } a < \text{eid } b \\
& \quad \vee \text{isMain } a \wedge \text{isShadow } b \wedge \text{eid } a == \text{eid } b \\
& \quad \vee \text{isShadow } a \wedge \text{isShadow } b \wedge \text{eid } a < \text{eid } b \\
& \quad \wedge (\text{var } a == \text{var } b \wedge (\text{isWrite } a \vee \text{isRead } a) \wedge \text{isWrite } b \\
& \quad \quad \vee \text{dataDep } a \ b \vee \text{controlDep } a \ b) \\
& \text{diffDep } x \ y \ a \ b = \text{crxw}'' \ x \ y \ a \ b \\
& \quad a \prec b = \text{pid } a < \text{pid } b \vee \text{pid } a == \text{pid } b \wedge \text{eid } a < \text{eid } b
\end{aligned}$$

crxw'' is like crxw' except that it considers shadow reads and shadow writes as the global read and write events. As for TSO and PSO, a shadow read is considered global, if it actually reads its value from memory, which in this model happens, if there is no older shadow write to the same location in the backlog. We consider events a and b to be in data-dependency, if a reads a register that is written by b . We consider two events to be in control-dependency, if the older one is a conditional and the newer one is a write.

4.1 Fences

In models like TSO, PSO and RMO that allow the reordering of some events, it becomes necessary to be able to forbid these reorderings in certain situations, to rule out relaxed behaviour. Our example from introduction does not behave correctly on TSO, where it is possible for both processors to read the value 0. To avoid this situation, it is necessary to make sure that both processors first perform the write and when the effects of the write operation have become globally visible they may perform the read. With this restriction the program behaves correctly on TSO and the way to achieve this is to insert a fence between the write and read instructions.

In our framework, fences are described by two parameters that can take the values *store* or *load*, which indicate between which events the ordering is enforced. Under SC, the fence instructions can be ignored since no reorderings are possible. To be able to restore sequentially consistent behaviour, TSO requires store-load fences, PSO requires also store-store fences, and RMO requires all four kinds of fences. For TSO, PSO, and RMO, the idea is that fences have shadow events and the *sameDep* relation is modified to disallow unwanted reorderings. Our example program requires a store-load fence, so that the read operations appearing after the fence cannot be performed before the write operations appearing before the fence have completed. This means that *sameDep* must be modified to consider a shadow store-load fence to be dependent with all older shadow write events and all newer read events. Dependence with a shadow event prevents the fence event from being removed from the backlog until the older dependent events have been removed and it also prevents removing the newer dependent events until the fence has been removed from the backlog. Likewise, a new main read event cannot be added to the execution, if there is a store-load fence event in the backlog. The idea is similar for the other types of fences.

5 Related Work

Relaxed memory consistency models and their specification and verification tasks have been an extensive research topic. Owens et al. [8] showed that x86 adheres to TSO model and they gave both operational

and axiomatic models. Alglave [2] defined a framework in an axiomatic style for working with relaxed memory models, which is also generic in the sense that different memory models can be represented by specifying which relations are considered global. Generating the possible executions in our framework turns out to be quite similar to an executable specification for RMO given by Park and Dill [9], more precisely, our notion of backlog seems to correspond to the reordering box used there. Boudol et al. [3] defined a generic operational semantics that captures TSO, PSO and RMO and uses temporary stores that again are similar to our backlogs; they did not however consider any partial order reduction of the set of executions of a program. As mentioned before, due to the interest in exploring the full set of executions by constructing it explicitly and the use of trace theory, which is the foundation for partial order reduction [5], this work is also close to methods based on model checking, like Zhang et al.'s [13] and Abdulla et al.'s [1]. An executable specification was also given by Yang et al. [12]. Their approach is based on axiomatic specifications and an execution is found by searching for an instantiation that satisfies all of the constraints, either by Prolog or a SAT solver.

6 Conclusion

We have presented a generic framework for finding canonical representatives of equivalence classes of the possible executions of a program. The framework proceeds by lazily generating all executions of the given program and discards all those that are not in Foata normal form. The framework allows to uniformly represent the semantics of a certain class of relaxed memory models, which we have illustrated by encoding the models from the SPARC hierarchy in terms of our framework. An instantiation of the framework to a particular model specifies which executions can occur at all for the given program and which of those are equivalent, i.e., correspond to one generalized Mazurkiewicz trace, representable by its normal form.

We plan to continue this work by elaborating on the formal aspects of the framework. We have formalized soundness and completeness of Foata normalization of (standard) traces in the dependently typed functional language Agda—any string is equivalent to its normal form, and if a string is equivalent to a normal form, it is that string's normal form. This development can be scaled for generalized traces, adapted to prove that the tree filtering algorithm keeps exactly one representative of each equivalence class of executions, to then move on to formalization of specifications of memory models.

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A Semantic Rules

Small steps of a processor

$$\frac{}{\Box I^{same} e'}$$

$$\frac{e I^{same} e' \quad bklg I^{same} e'}{e : bklg I^{same} e'}$$

$$\frac{shadows(act) \quad bklg I^{same} (eid, \circ, act)}{(act : prg, bklg, eid) \xrightarrow{(eid, \circ, act)} (prg, (eid, \bullet, act) : bklg, eid + 1)}$$

$$\frac{\neg shadows(act) \quad bklg I^{same} (eid, \circ, act)}{(act : prg, bklg, eid) \xrightarrow{(eid, \circ, act)} (prg, bklg, eid + 1)}$$

$$\frac{older I^{same} le}{(prg, newer ++ (le : older), eid) \xrightarrow{le} (prg, newer ++ older, eid)}$$

$$\frac{(prg_i, bklg, eid) \xrightarrow{le} c}{(prg_0 + prg_1, bklg, eid) \xrightarrow{le} c}$$

Small steps of the system

$$\frac{c(pid) = lc \quad lc \xrightarrow{le} lc'}{c \xrightarrow{(pid, le)} c[pid \mapsto lc']}$$

Executions

$$\frac{\forall pid. c(pid) = (\square, \square, -)}{c \Downarrow c} \quad \frac{c \xrightarrow{e} c'' \quad c'' \xrightarrow{es} c'}{c \xrightarrow{e:es} c'}$$

Normal executions

$$\frac{le I^{same} le'}{(pid, le) I_{ss} (pid, le')} \quad \frac{pid \neq pid' \quad le I_{ss}^{diff} le'}{(pid, le) I_{ss} (pid', le')}$$

$$\frac{e \prec e'}{[e] \prec e'} \quad \frac{e \prec e'}{s : e \prec e'} \quad \frac{e I_{ss} e'}{[e] I_{ss} e'} \quad \frac{s I_{ss} e' \quad e I_{ss} e'}{s : e I_{ss} e'}$$

$$\overline{ss \vdash \square}$$

$$\frac{\square : [e] \vdash es}{\square \vdash e : es} \quad \frac{s I_{\square} e \quad s \prec e \quad \square : (s : e) \vdash es}{\square : s \vdash e : es}$$

$$\frac{\neg(s I_{ss} e) \quad ss : s : [e] \vdash es}{ss : s \vdash e : es} \quad \frac{\neg(s I_{ss} e) \quad s' I_{ss:s} e \quad s' \prec e \quad ss : s : (s' : e) \vdash es}{ss : s : s' \vdash e : es}$$