Grounding Game Semantics in Categorical Algebra

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I present a formal connection between *algebraic effects* and *game semantics*, two important lines of work in programming language semantics with applications in compositional software verification.

Specifically, the algebraic signature enumerating the possible side-effects of a computation can be read as a game, and strategies for this game constitute the free algebra for the signature in a category of complete partial orders (*cpos*). Hence, strategies provide a convenient model of computations with uninterpreted side-effects. In particular, the operational flavor of game semantics carries over to the algebraic context, in the form of the coincidence between the initial algebras and the terminal coalgebras of cpo endofunctors.

Conversely, the algebraic point of view sheds new light on the strategy constructions underlying game semantics. Strategy models can be reformulated as ideal completions of partial strategy trees (free dcpos on the term algebra). Extending the framework to multi-sorted signatures would make this construction available for a large class of games.

1 Introduction

Writing bug-free software is notoriously hard. Current practice encourages comprehensive testing, but while testing can reveal bugs it can never completely guarantee their absence. Therefore, for critical systems, *verification* has become the gold standard: the desired behavior is described as a mathematical specification, against which the implemented system is formally proven correct [46].

Over the past decade, researchers have been able to apply this methodology to larger and larger systems: there are now verified compilers [37, 50, 35], operating system kernels [31, 23, 24], and even verified processor designs [11, 19]. As a result, the construction of large-scale, heterogeneous computer systems which are fully verified is now within reach [12]. A system of this kind would be described end-to-end by a mathematical model, and certified correct by a computer-checked proof, providing a strong guarantee that a given combination of hardware and software components behaves as expected.

Unfortunately, composing certified components into certified systems is difficult. For verification to be tractable, the models and techniques used must often be tailored to the component at hand. As a result, given two certified components developed independently, it is often challenging to interface their proofs of correctness to construct a larger proof encompassing them both. To facilitate this process, a key task will be to establish a *hierarchy* of common models. Using this hierarchy, individual certified components could continue to use specialized models, but these models could then be embedded into more general ones, where components and proofs of different kinds would be made interoperable.

Category theory is an important tool for this task. It can help us characterize existing models and compare them in a common framework. As a systematic study of compositional structures, it can then guide the design of more general models capable of describing heterogeneous systems. This paper proposes to use this methodology to explore connections between two related but distinct lines of work:

- *Algebraic effects* [44, 45] offer a computational reading of basic concepts in categorical algebra for the purpose of modeling, combining, and reasoning about side-effects in computations. They

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are a principled solution grounded in well-established mathematics, and have prompted novel and promising approaches to programming language design.

- *Game semantics* [1, 7] describe interfaces of program components as *games* played between a component and its environment, characterizing the component's behavior as a *strategy* in this game. This approach has been used to give compositional semantics to existing language features which had previously resisted a satisfactory treatment.

The theory of algebraic effects is outlined in section 2. After introducing game semantics, section 3 uses the associated techniques to construct a *strategy* model of uninterpreted algebraic effects. This model can be characterized as an initial algebra in a particular category of complete partial orders, and reformulated as a completion of the term algebra. Section 4 proposes to extend this construction to a larger class of games by considering different completions and multi-sorted effect signatures.

I will use the notations $\mathbb{1} := \{*\}$ and $\mathbb{2} := \{\mathsf{tt}, \mathsf{ff}\}$. The set of finite sequences over an alphabet Σ is written Σ^*, with ε as the empty sequence and $s \cdot t$ as the concatenation of the sequences s and t. With that said, since the mathematics presented here are ultimately intended to be mechanized in a proof assistant, I will often prefer the use of inductive grammars rather than sets of sequences.

2 Models of computational side-effects

Modeling the *side-effects* of computer programs is a long-standing research topic in programming language semantics. I begin this paper by summarizing the underlying issues and present the approach known as *algebraic effects* [44].

2.1 Monadic effects

Programs which perform pure calculations are straightforward to interpret mathematically. For example,

$$\mathrm{abs}(x) := \textbf{if } x > 0 \textbf{ then return } x \textbf{ else return } -x \tag{1}$$

can be characterized using the function $f : \mathbb{R} \to \mathbb{R}$ which maps x to $|x|$. By contrast, consider the program

$$\mathrm{greeting}(*) := (\textbf{if } \mathsf{readbit} \textbf{ then } \mathsf{print} \text{ “Hi” } \textbf{else } \mathsf{print} \text{ “Hello”})\,;\,\mathsf{stop} \tag{2}$$

which reads a single bit of input, outputs “Hi” or “Hello” depending on the value of that bit, then terminates without producing a value. The *side-effects* performed by the operations readbit, print and stop are more difficult to model. Certainly, (2) cannot be described as a function $g : \mathbb{1} \to \varnothing$.

The traditional way to address this issue is to capture the available side-effects in a *monad* $\langle T, \eta, \mu \rangle$ [42]. Then TX represents computations with a result in X which may also perform side-effects. The monad's unit $\eta : X \to TX$ corresponds to **return**, a pure computation which terminates immediately. The multiplication $\mu : TTX \to TX$ first performs the effects of the outer computation, then those of the computation it evaluates to. This allows us to compose the computations $f : A \to TB$ and $g : B \to TC$ sequentially (;) by using their Kleisli composition $\mu \circ Tg \circ f$.

Example 1. *To assign a meaning to the program (2), we can use the following monad in* **Set***:*

$$TX := (\Sigma^* \times X_\perp)^{\mathbb{2}} \qquad \eta(x) := b \mapsto (\varepsilon, x) \qquad \mu\big(i \mapsto \big(s_i, j \mapsto (s'_{ij}, x_{ij})\big)\big) := b \mapsto \big(s_b \cdot s'_{bb}, x_{bb}\big)$$

An element of TX is a function which takes as input the bit to be read by $\mathsf{readbit}$. *In addition to the computation's result, which can be $\bot$ as well as a result in X, the function produces a sequence of characters from a fixed alphabet Σ. The operations* $\mathsf{readbit}$, print *and* stop *can be interpreted as:*

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathsf{readbit} \in T\mathbb{2} & \mathsf{print} : \Sigma^* \to T\mathbb{1} & \mathsf{stop} \in T\varnothing \\ \mathsf{readbit} := b \mapsto (\varepsilon, b) & \mathsf{print}(s) := b \mapsto (s, *) & \mathsf{stop} := b \mapsto (\varepsilon, \bot) \end{array}$$

Then, the program (2) can be characterized using the function $g : \mathbb{1} \to T\varnothing$ defined by:

$$g(*) := b \mapsto \begin{cases} (\text{“Hi”}, \bot) & \text{if } b = \mathsf{tt} \\ (\text{“Hello”}, \bot) & \text{if } b = \mathsf{ff} \end{cases}$$

2.2 Algebraic effects

A long-standing issue with the monadic approach to computational side-effects is that in general, monads do not compose. This makes it difficult to combine programs which use different kinds of side-effects. This can be addressed by restricting our attention to monads describing *algebraic* effects.

Computations with side-effects are then seen as *terms* in an algebra. Function symbols correspond to the available effects. Their arities correspond to the number of possible outcomes of the effect, and each argument specifies how the computation will continue should the corresponding outcome occur.

Example 2. *To interpret our running example, the algebraic signature must contain the function symbols* $\mathsf{readbit} : 2$, $\mathsf{print}[s] : 1$ *and* $\mathsf{stop} : 0$. *The behavior of the program (2) can then be represented as the term:*

$$\mathsf{readbit}\big(\mathsf{print}[\text{“Hi”}](\mathsf{stop}), \mathsf{print}[\text{“Hello”}](\mathsf{stop})\big)$$

and visualized as the tree:

$$\begin{tikzcd}[column sep=small] & \mathsf{readbit} \arrow[dl, dash] \arrow[dr, dash] & \\ \mathsf{print}[\text{“Hi”}] \arrow[d, dash] & & \mathsf{print}[\text{“Hello”}] \arrow[d, dash] \\ \mathsf{stop} & & \mathsf{stop} \end{tikzcd}$$

Note that $\mathsf{print}[s]$ *corresponds to a* family *of operations indexed by a parameter $s \in \Sigma^*$.*

A major advantage of this approach is that the basic framework of universal algebra can immediately be brought to bear. For example, equational theories including statements such as:

$$\mathsf{print}[s](\mathsf{print}[s'](x)) = \mathsf{print}[s \cdot s'](x)$$

can be used to characterize the behavior of the different effects and their possible interactions. Algebraic theories can be combined in various ways [28], making possible a compositional treatment of effects. Below, I present a simple version of the approach, starting with the following notion of effect signature.

Definition 3. *An* effect signature *is a set E of function symbols together with a mapping* $\mathsf{ar} : E \to \mathbf{Set}$ *which assigns to each function symbol $m \in E$ an* arity set $\mathsf{ar}(m)$. *I will use the notation*

$$E = \{m_1 : N_1, m_2 : N_2, \ldots\}$$

where $N_i = \mathsf{ar}(m_i)$ is the arity set assigned to the function symbol m_i.

The use of arity *sets* allow us to encode effects such as $\mathsf{readnat} : \mathbb{N}$ which have an infinite number of possible outcomes. In this case, the argument tuples will be families indexed by $\mathbb{N}$ and the corresponding terms will be written as $\mathsf{readnat}(x_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$.

2.3 Initial algebras

To give a categorical account of the algebras generated by an effect signature E, we start by interpreting the signature as an endofunctor on **Set**.

Definition 4. *An effect signature E defines an endofunctor $E : \mathbf{Set} \to \mathbf{Set}$ of the same name, as:*

$$EX := \sum_{m \in E} \prod_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)} X$$

The elements of EX are terms of depth one with variables in X. This is emphasized by the following notation (I use underlining to distinguish term constructors from the corresponding elements of E):

$$t \in EX ::= \underline{m}\langle x_n \rangle_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)} \qquad (m \in E,\, x \in X)$$

Terms of a fixed depth k can be obtained by iterating the endofunctor as $E^k X$. More generally, the set of all finite terms over the signature can be defined as follows.

Definition 5. *Finite terms over an effect signature E with variables in X are generated by the grammar:*

$$t \in E^* X ::= \underline{x} \mid \underline{m}(t_n)_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)} \qquad (m \in E,\, x \in X)$$

Note the use of angle brackets $\langle - \rangle$ for simple applications *vs.* parentheses $(-)$ for recursive terms.

Interpretations of the signature E in a carrier set A are algebras $\alpha : EA \to A$ for the endofunctor E. They can be decomposed into the cotuple $\alpha = [\alpha^m]_{m \in E}$ where $\alpha^m : A^{\mathsf{ar}(m)} \to A$. Algebras for E constitute a category $\mathbf{Set}^E$ where the morphisms of type $\langle A, \alpha \rangle \to \langle B, \beta \rangle$ are the functions $f : A \to B$ satisfying:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} EA & \xrightarrow{\alpha} & A \\ {\scriptstyle Ef}\downarrow & & \downarrow{\scriptstyle f} \\ EB & \xrightarrow{\beta} & B \end{array} \qquad\qquad f \circ \alpha = \beta \circ Ef$$

It is well-known [48] that the forgetful "carrier set" functor of type $\mathbf{Set}^E \to \mathbf{Set}$ has a left adjoint. This adjoint maps a set X to the term algebra $c^E_X : E(E^* X) \to E^* X$. Concretely, $c^E_X = [c^m_X]_{m \in E}$ constructs terms of the form $\underline{m}(t_n)_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)}$, whereas the adjunction's unit $\eta^E_X : X \to E^* X$ embeds the variables:

$$c^E_X\big(\underline{m}\langle t_n \rangle_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)}\big) := \underline{m}(t_n)_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)} \qquad\qquad \eta^E_X(x) := \underline{x}$$

The adjuction's counit $\varepsilon^E_\alpha : \langle E^* A, c^E_A \rangle \to \langle A, \alpha \rangle$ evaluates terms under their interpretation $\alpha : EA \to A$:

$$\varepsilon^E_\alpha\big(\underline{m}(t_n)_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)}\big) := \alpha\big(\underline{m}\langle \varepsilon^E_\alpha(t_n) \rangle_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)}\big) \qquad\qquad \varepsilon^E_\alpha(\underline{a}) := a$$

The monad $\langle E^*, \eta^E, \mu^E \rangle$ arising from this adjunction is called the *free monad* associated with E, and it establishes a connection with the approach described in subsection 2.1.

The preservation of colimits by left adjoints means that the initial object in the category $\mathbf{Set}^E$ is given by the algebra $\mu E = \langle E^* \varnothing, c^E_\varnothing \rangle$. Conversely, $E^* X$ can be characterized as the initial algebra

$$[c^E_X, \eta^E_X] \,:\, E(E^* X) + X \,\to\, E^* X$$

for a different endofunctor $Y \mapsto EY + X$. Given an algebra $[\alpha, \rho] : EA + X \to A$, which provides an interpretation $\alpha^m : A^{\mathsf{ar}(m)} \to A$ for each function symbol $m \in E$, and an assignment $\rho : X \to A$ of the variables of X, there is a unique algebra homomorphism $\phi_{\alpha,\rho} : \langle E^*X, [c_X^E, \eta_X^E] \rangle \to \langle A, [\alpha, \rho] \rangle$:

$$\begin{tikzcd}
E(E^*X) \arrow[r, "c_X^E"] \arrow[d, "E\phi_{\alpha,\rho}"] & E^*X \arrow[d, dashed, "!\,\phi_{\alpha,\rho}"] & X \arrow[l, "\eta_X^E"'] \arrow[d, equal] \\
EA \arrow[r, "\alpha"] & A & X \arrow[l, "\rho"']
\end{tikzcd}$$

Note that $\phi_{\alpha,\rho} = \varepsilon_\alpha \circ E^*\rho$ and conversely $\varepsilon_\alpha = \phi_{\alpha,\mathrm{id}_A}$.

This universal property provides a foundation for *effect handlers* [45], a programming language construction which allows a computation to be transformed by reinterpreting its effects and outcome, generalizing the well-established use of *exception* handlers. Using a different kind F^*Y of computations as the target set, a *handler* $h : E^*X \to F^*Y$ can be specified using the following data:

- a mapping $\rho_h : X \to F^*Y$ which provides a computation $\rho_h(x) \in F^*Y$ meant to be executed when the original computation concludes with a result $x \in X$;
- an interpretation $\alpha_h^m : (F^*Y)^{\mathsf{ar}(m)} \to F^*Y$ for each $m \in E$ providing a computation $\alpha_h^m(k_n)_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)}$ to be executed when the original computation triggers the effect m.

Each argument $k_n \in F^*Y$ of α_h^m corresponds to the (recursively transformed) behavior of the original computation resumed by the outcome $n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)$. We are free to use several of these continuations, each one potentially multiple times, to assign an interpretation to the effect. This flexibility allows handlers to express a great variety of control flow operators found in modern programming languages.

2.4 Final coalgebras

The free monad E^* over an effect signature E allows us to represent *finite* computations with side-effects in E but does not account for *infinite* computations. By considering the coalgebras for $Y \mapsto EY + X$ instead of algebras, we can construct an alternative monad E^∞ which does not exhibit the same limitation. Coalgebras are ubiquitous in computer science, where they appear in the guise of automata and transition systems. Their use in the context of algebraic effects therefore presents the additional advantage of establishing a connection with the associated *operational* style of semantics.

Concretely, a coalgebra for the endofunctor $Y \mapsto EY + X$ equips a set of states Q with a transition function $\delta : Q \to EQ + X$ describing what happens when the computation is in a given state $q \in Q$:

- if $\delta(q) = \underline{m}\langle q'_n \rangle_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(n)}$, the computation triggers the effect $m \in E$, and continues in state q'_n when it is resumed by the outcome $n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)$;
- if $\delta(q) = \underline{x}$, the computation terminates with the result $x \in X$.

We define $\langle E^\infty X, d_X^E \rangle := \nu Y \,.\, EY + X$ as the final such coalgebra, which satisfies the universal property:

$$\begin{tikzcd}
Q \arrow[r, "\delta"] \arrow[d, dashed, "!\,\psi_\delta"'] & EQ + X \arrow[d, "E\psi_\delta + \mathrm{id}_X"] \\
E^\infty X \arrow[r, "d_X^E"] & E(E^\infty X) + X
\end{tikzcd}$$

An applicable construction of terminal coalgebras can be found in [34].

Like E^*, the terminal coalgebra construction E^∞ forms a monad [20], but it can express infinite as well as finite computations with effects in E. This is used to great effect in *interaction trees* [33], a data structure designed along these lines and formalized using coinductive types in the Coq proof assistant. A comprehensive library provides proof principles and categorical combinators for interactions trees, and they are used in the context of the DeepSpec project [12] to interface disparate certified components.

Nevertheless, there are limitations to this approach. In particular, infinite computations often exhibit *silently divergent* behaviors (infinite loops). Modeling these behaviors requires the introduction of a null effect $\tau : \mathbb{1}$ in the signature E, which coalgebras can then use to delay any interaction. The elements of $E^\infty X$ must then be considered *up to* τ (that is, in the context of an algebraic theory which includes the equation $\tau(x) = x$). This requires the use of sophisticated simulation techniques to take into account the distinction between finite iterations (τ^*) and silent divergence (τ^ω).

Less constructively, we can model silent divergence as its own effect $\bot : \varnothing$. We will see in the next section that game semantics can be read as a principled treatment of this approach, which reestablishes a connection with algebras and denotational semantics.

3 Strategies for uninterpreted effects

The theory of algebraic effects has a limited scope: it is intended to be used in conjunction with existing approaches to programming language semantics to facilitate the treatment of computational side-effects. By contrast, game semantics is its own approach to denotational semantics. Game models often feature rich, high-order compositional structures. This reflects the languages they are designed to interpret and the origins of the technique in the semantics of linear logic. On the other hand, the principles underlying the *construction* of game models are somewhat more hazy, and a huge variety of approaches have been proposed.

Nevertheless, I begin this section by attempting to give a high-level account of what could be dubbed the *classical* approach, in line with [15, 3, 4, 27]. By reading algebraic signatures as simple games, I then deploy some of the techniques used in game semantics to construct a particularly pleasant model of algebraic effects. This model can be characterized by specializing the theory of algebraic effects to the category $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$ of directed-complete pointed partial orders and strict Scott-continuous functions [5]. Notably, the reconciliation operated by game semantics between denotational and operational semantics finds a formal expression in the coincidence between the initial algebras and terminal coalgebras of endofunctors in $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$.

3.1 Games and strategies

The games used in game semantics involve two players: the *proponent* P and the *opponent* O. The player P represents the *system* being modeled, while O represents its *environment*. The games we will consider are sequential and alternating: the opponent opens the game by playing first, after which the two players contribute every other move. Game semantics sometimes use simple notions of payoffs, in which case only the *winning* strategies will be considered, but by contrast with game theory the focus is primarily on the *structure of the interaction* between the two players rather than rational behavior and notions of equilibria. The games I will consider here do not use any kind of winning condition.

Traditionally, a game G is specified by a set of *moves* $M_G = M_G^{\mathsf{O}} \uplus M_G^{\mathsf{P}}$ partitioned into opponent and proponent moves. Then the *plays* of the game G are finite sequences of the form $m_1 \underline{m_2} m_3 \underline{m_4} \cdots$, where $m_1, m_3, \ldots \in M^{\mathsf{O}}$ are opponent moves and $\underline{m_2}, \underline{m_4}, \ldots \in M^{\mathsf{P}}$ are proponent moves. The set P_G of valid plays of G is often restricted further, to account for the additional structure of the particular game model at hand. In any case, the objects of interest are then the *strategies* for P, which can be modeled as prefix-closed sets of plays $\sigma \subseteq P_G$ which prescribe at most one proponent action in any particular situation:

$$\forall s \in P_G^{\text{odd}} \,.\, \forall \underline{m}, \underline{m}' \in M^{\mathsf{P}} \,.\, s\underline{m}, s\underline{m}' \in \sigma \Rightarrow \underline{m} = \underline{m}' \,. \tag{3}$$

Although plays are finite, infinite behaviors can be modeled as prefix-closed sets of finite approximations.

Categories of games and strategies can then be constructed. The objects are games. The morphisms are strategies $\sigma : A \to B$ which play a combination of the game A as the opponent O and the game B as the proponent P, starting with an opening move from the environment in B. Game semantics is related to linear logic [15], and categories of games and strategies often come with a rich structure, for example:

- the game $A \,\&\, B$ is played as A or B at the discretion of the opponent,
- in the game $A \otimes B$, the games A and B are played side by side,
- the game $!A$ allows multiple copies of A to be played at the discretion of the opponent, and
- the game $A^{\perp}$ reverses the roles of O and P.

There are infinite variations on this basic setup, which have been used to model imperative programming [6], references [2], advanced control structures [36], nondeterminism [25, 22, 49, 43, 18, 16, 32], concurrency [21], etc. Another line of research explores more fundamental variations on constructions of game and strategies [8, 41, 39, 40], attempting to provide simpler models of advanced features and to ground game semantics in a more systematic approach.

3.2 Strategies for effect signatures

Effect signatures can be read as particularly simple games [16, 32]. Under this interpretation, a computation represented as a term in E^*X proceeds in the following way:

- the computation chooses a function symbol $m \in E$,
- the environment chooses an argument position $n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)$.

This process is iterated until eventually the computation chooses a variable $x \in X$ rather than a function symbol, terminating the interaction. In other words, a term $t \in E^*X$ can be interpreted as a strategy for a simple game derived from E and X. We can exploit this analogy to build a model of computations with side-effects which mimics the construction of strategies in game semantics.

Definition 6 (Costrategies over effect signatures)**.** *The* coplays *over an effect signature E with results in a set X are generated by the grammar:*

$$s \in \bar{P}_E(X) ::= \underline{x} \mid \underline{m} \mid \underline{m}ns \qquad (x \in X, m \in E, n \in \mathsf{ar}(m))$$

The set $\bar{P}_E(X)$ is ordered by a prefix *relation $\sqsubseteq \; \subseteq \bar{P}_E(A) \times \bar{P}_E(A)$, which is the smallest relation satisfying:*

$$\underline{x} \sqsubseteq \underline{x} \qquad \underline{m} \sqsubseteq \underline{m} \qquad \underline{m} \sqsubseteq \underline{m}nt \qquad s \sqsubseteq t \Rightarrow \underline{m}ns \sqsubseteq \underline{m}nt$$

In addition, the coherence *relation $\supset\!\!\!\!\subset \; \subseteq \bar{P}_E(X) \times \bar{P}_E(X)$ is the smallest relation satisfying:*

$$\underline{x} \frown \underline{x} \qquad \underline{m} \frown \underline{m} \qquad \underline{m} \frown \underline{m}ns \qquad (n_1 = n_2 \Rightarrow s_1 \frown s_2) \Rightarrow \underline{m}n_1s_1 \frown \underline{m}n_2s_2$$

Then a costrategy *over the effect signature E with results in X is a downward-closed set $\sigma \subseteq \bar{P}_E(X)$ of pairwise coherent coplays. I will write $\bar{S}_E(X)$ for the set of such costrategies.*

Note that by contrast with the usual convention, the first move is played by the system rather than the environment, hence my use of the terminology *coplays* and *costrategies*. Moreover, formulating the condition (3) by using a coherence relation is slightly non-traditional though not without precedent [17]. Apart from these details, Definition 6 is fairly typical of the game semantics approach.

Switching back to the algebraic point of view, we can interpret the terms of E^*X in $\bar{S}_E(X)$ by defining an algebra $[\alpha,\rho] : E\bar{S}_E(X)+X \to \bar{S}_E(X)$ as follows:

$$\alpha\big(\underline{m}\langle\sigma_n\rangle_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)}\big) := \{\underline{m}\} \cup \{\underline{m}ns \mid n \in \mathsf{ar}(m), s \in \sigma_n\} \qquad\qquad \rho(x) := \{\underline{x}\}$$

The resulting homomorphism $\phi_{\alpha,\rho} : E^*X \to \bar{S}_E(X)$ is an embedding. However, $\bar{S}_E$ contains many more behaviors, including the undefined or divergent behavior $\varnothing$ as well as infinite behaviors, represented as their sets of finite prefixes. In fact,

Proposition 7. *$\langle\bar{S}_E,\subseteq\rangle$ is a pointed directed-complete partial order.*

Proof. The empty set is trivially a costrategy. For a directed set D of costrategies, their union $\bigcup D$ is again a costrategy. Indeed, since D is directed, any two plays $s_1 \in \sigma_1 \in D$ and $s_2 \in \sigma_2 \in D$ must be coherent: there exists a strategy $\sigma' \in D$ which includes both σ_1 and σ_2, hence contains both s_1 and s_2. □

This invites us to give a characterization of $\bar{S}_E(X)$ similar to that of E^*X, by working in the category $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$ of pointed dcpos and strict Scott-continuous functions.

3.3 Complete partial orders

Directed-complete partial orders (dcpo for short) are fundamental to denotational semantics of programming languages. Before proceeding further, I summarize a few relevant properties of the category of pointed dcpos and strict Scott-continuous functions.

Definition 8. *A* directed-complete partial order *$\langle A,\sqsubseteq\rangle$ is a partial order with all directed suprema: any directed subset $D \subseteq A$ has a least upper bound $\sqcup^{\uparrow} D \in A$, where* directed *means that D is non-empty and that any two $x,y \in D$ have an upper bound $z \in D$. A* pointed *dcpo has a least element $\perp$.*

A strict Scott-continuous map *$f : \langle A,\sqsubseteq\rangle \to \langle B,\leq\rangle$ between pointed dcpos is a function between the underlying sets which preserves the least element $\perp$ and all directed suprema. The category of pointed dcpos and strict Scott-continous maps is named* $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$.

The category $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$ is complete and cocomplete, as well as symmetric monoidal closed with respect to the *smash* product. The cartesian product $\prod_{i\in I}\langle A_i,\sqsubseteq_i\rangle$ is as expected: the underlying set $\prod_{i\in I} A_i$ is ordered component-wise and $(\perp_i)_{i\in I}$ is the least element. The smash product $A\otimes B$ is obtained by identifying all tuples of $A\times B$ in which at least one component is $\perp$. The coproduct $A\oplus B$ is called the *coalesced sum*. It is similar to the coproduct of sets but identifies $\iota_1(\perp_A) = \iota_2(\perp_B) = \perp_{A\oplus B}$.

The *lifting* comonad $(-)_\perp$ associated with the adjunction between $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$ and $\mathbf{DCPO}$ extends a dcpo with a new least element $\perp$. It can be used to represent (merely) Scott-continuous maps as strict Kleisli morphisms $f : A_\perp \to B$ in $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$. Conversely, a strict map out of $A_\perp$ can be specified by its (merely Scott-continuous) action on the elements of A. I will use the same notation to describe the flat domain construction $(-)_\perp : \mathbf{Set} \to \mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$, left adjoint to the forgetful functor from $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$ to $\mathbf{Set}$.

One remarkable property enjoyed by $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$ (and indeed by all $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$-enriched categories [9]), is that every enriched endofunctor F has both an initial algebra $c : F\mu F \to \mu F$ and a terminal coalgebra $d : \nu F \to F\nu F$. Furthermore, the two coincide in the sense that $\mu F = \nu F$ and $c^{-1} = d$.

3.4 Algebraic characterization of strategies

The costrategies for an effect signature E and a set of outcomes X can be characterized as

$$\bar{S}_E(X) \cong \mu Y \,.\, \hat{E}Y \oplus X_\perp \,, \tag{4}$$

where $\hat{E}$ is defined as follows.

Definition 9. *The endofunctor $\hat{E} : \mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp !} \to \mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp !}$ associated with the effect signature E is:*

$$\hat{E}Y := \bigoplus_m \Big(\prod_n Y \Big)_\perp \,.$$

Algebraically, the introduction of $(-)_\perp$ in the definition of $\hat{E}Y$ allows the operations to be non-strict. When an effect $m \in E$ is interpreted, the resulting computation may be partially or completely defined even if the continuation always diverges. In other words, it may be the case that $\alpha^m(\perp)_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)} \neq \perp$. In terms of game semantics, this corresponds to the fact that all odd-length prefixes of coplays are observed, as witnessed by the case $\underline{m} \in \bar{P}_E$ in Definition 6.

Theorem 10. *For an effect signature E and a set X, the pointed dcpo $\bar{S}_E(X)$ carries the coinciding initial algebra and terminal coalgebra for the endofunctor $Y \mapsto \hat{E}Y \oplus X_\perp$ on $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp !}$.*

Proof. The algebra $[\hat{c}^E_X, \hat{\eta}] : \hat{E}\,\bar{S}_E(X) \oplus X_\perp \to \bar{S}_E(X)$ can be defined as:

$$\hat{c}^E_X\big(\underline{m}\langle \sigma_n \rangle_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)}\big) := \{\underline{m}\} \cup \{\underline{m}ns \mid n \in \mathsf{ar}(m), s \in \sigma_n\} \qquad \hat{\eta}^E_X(x) := \{\underline{x}\}$$

It is easy to verify that the coplays in $\hat{c}^E_X\big(\underline{m}\langle \sigma_n \rangle_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)}\big)$ and $\hat{\eta}^E_X(x)$ are downward closed and pairwise coherent if the σ_i's are. The coalgebra $\hat{d}^E_X : \bar{S}_E(X) \to \hat{E}\bar{S}_E(X) \oplus X_\perp$ can be defined as:

$$\hat{d}^E_X(\sigma) := \begin{cases} \underline{m}\langle \{s \mid mns \in \sigma\} \rangle_{n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)} & \text{if } \underline{m} \in \sigma \\ \underline{x} & \text{if } \underline{x} \in \sigma \\ \perp & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

The coherence condition on σ ensures that the cases are mutually exclusive and that $\hat{c}^E_X$ and $\hat{d}^E_X$ are mutual inverses. Thanks to the coincidence of initial algebras and terminal coalgebras in $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp !}$, this is enough to establish the initiality of $\langle \bar{S}_E(X), [\hat{c}^E_X, \hat{\eta}^E_X] \rangle$ and the terminality of $\langle \bar{S}_E(X), \hat{d}^E_X \rangle$. ☐

While much more general constructions of free algebras in dcpos have been described [13], they tend to be complex. At the cost of a restriction to effect signatures and *sets* of variables, costrategies provide a simple construction with a transparent operational reading. It may also be possible to extend this construction to incorporate limited forms of equational theories by acting on the ordering of coplays.

3.5 Strategies as ideal completions

The algebraic characterization of costrategies given above invites us to consider more closely the relationship between $E^* : \mathbf{Set} \to \mathbf{Set}$ and $\bar{S}_E : \mathbf{Set} \to \mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp !}$. It turns out the costrategies in $\bar{S}_E(X)$ can be constructed as the ideal completion of $E^*(X_\perp)$.

Definition 11. *An* ideal *of a partial order A is a downward closed directed subset of A. I will write $\mathscr{I}A$ for the set of ideals of A, ordered under set inclusion.*

The ideals of A form a dcpo; if A has a least element, then $\mathscr{I}A$ is pointed dcpo. In fact, $\mathscr{I}A$ is the *free* dcpo generated by the partially ordered set A, as expressed by the adjunctions:

$$\begin{tikzcd}
\mathbf{DCPO} \arrow[d, shift right, "(-)_\perp"'] \arrow[r, shift right, "U"'] \arrow[r, phantom, "\perp"] & \mathbf{Pos} \arrow[l, shift right, "\mathscr{I}"'] \arrow[d, shift right, "(-)_\perp"'] \\
\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!} \arrow[u, shift right, "U"'] \arrow[u, phantom, "\dashv"] \arrow[r, shift right, "U"'] \arrow[r, phantom, "\perp"] & \mathbf{Pos}_\perp \arrow[l, shift right, "\mathscr{I}"'] \arrow[u, shift right, "U"'] \arrow[u, phantom, "\dashv"]
\end{tikzcd}$$

The unit $\downarrow : A \to \mathscr{I}A$ embeds a partial order A into its completion. A (strict) Scott-continuous map of type $f : \mathscr{I}A \to B$ can be specified by its (strict) monotonic action $f(\downarrow a)$ on the elements $a \in A$.

Definition 12 (Ordering terms)**.** *For an effect signature E and a partial order $\langle X, \leq \rangle$, we extend EX to a partial order $E\langle X, \leq \rangle := \langle EX, \sqsubseteq \rangle$ by defining $\sqsubseteq$ using the rule:*

$$\frac{\forall n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)\ .\ x_n \leq y_n}{\underline{m}\langle x_n \rangle_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)} \sqsubseteq \underline{m}\langle y_n \rangle_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)}}$$

If $\langle X, \leq \rangle$ has a least element $\perp$, we extend E^*X to a partial order $\langle E^*X, \sqsubseteq \rangle$ using the inductive rules:

$$\frac{\forall n \in \mathsf{ar}(m)\ .\ t_n \sqsubseteq t'_n}{\underline{m}(t_n)_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)} \sqsubseteq \underline{m}(t'_n)_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)}} \qquad \frac{x \leq y}{\underline{x} \sqsubseteq \underline{y}} \qquad \frac{}{\underline{\perp} \sqsubseteq t}$$

Here the elements of E^*X are interpreted as *partial* terms, where the special variable $\perp \in X$ indicates a lack of information about a given subterm. In particular, consider a situation where $t_1, t_2 \sqsubseteq t$. This means that t_1 and t_2 are both truncated versions of the more defined term t and are therefore compatible in the following sense: although t_1 may be defined where t_2 is not and vice versa, they will not conflict on any of their defined subterms and they can be merged into $t_1 \sqcup t_2$. By using the ideal completion, we can extend this procedure to arbitrary directed sets, enabling the construction of infinite terms.

Theorem 13. *For an effect signature E and a set X, the following partial orders are isomorphic:*

$$\bar{S}_E(X) \cong \mathscr{I}E^*(X_\perp)$$

Proof. It suffices to show that $\mathscr{I}E^*(X_\perp)$ satisfies the characterization of $\bar{S}_E(X)$ given by Theorem 10. We can proceed in the same way. The algebra $[\hat{c}^E_X, \hat{\eta}^E_X] : \hat{E}\mathscr{I}E^*(X_\perp) \oplus X_\perp \to \mathscr{I}E^*(X_\perp)$ is defined by:

$$\hat{c}^E_X\big(\underline{m}\langle \downarrow t_n \rangle_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)}\big) := \downarrow \underline{m}(t_n)_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)} \qquad \hat{\eta}^E_X(x) := \downarrow \underline{x}$$

The coalgebra $\hat{d}^E_X : \mathscr{I}E^*(X_\perp) \to \hat{E}\mathscr{I}E^*(X_\perp) \oplus X_\perp$ can be defined as:

$$\hat{d}^E_X\big(\downarrow \underline{m}(t_n)_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)}\big) := \underline{m}\langle \downarrow t_n \rangle_{n\in\mathsf{ar}(m)} \qquad \hat{d}^E_X(\downarrow \underline{x}) := \underline{x}$$

As before, it is easy to check that the required conditions hold and that $\hat{c}^E_X$ and $\hat{d}^E_X$ are mutual inverses. $\square$

Finally, it has been shown [10] that $\mathscr{I}E^*(X_\perp) \cong E^\infty(X_\perp)$. Hence, Theorem 13 also establishes a connection between strategies and the coalgebraic approach discussed in subsection 2.4.

4 Towards algebraic game semantics

The constructions given in the previous section provide a model of algebraic effects grounded in an interpretation of effect signatures as games. Conversely, while effect signatures are a very restricted class of games, the analysis above establishes a blueprint for a broader reading of games and strategy constructions under the lens of categorical algebra.

My hope is that by extending the basic framework in various directions, it would become possible to account for a broad range of existing game models and provide insight into the details of their construction. Ideally, the resulting theory would decouple various aspects of their design and provide a general construction toolkit for game semantics. In this section I outline several possible avenues for future work in this direction, and point to some existing work relevant to that goal.

4.1 Varying the order completion

The reformulation of costrategies as ideal completions presented in subsection 3.5 invites generalization in at least two different ways.

First, since it is built from terms rather than plays, it provides a better starting point for incorporating equational (and inequational) theories to the model, specifically by quotienting the set of terms $E^*(X_\perp)$ before the ideal completion is applied. This would permit the use of a broader range of theories than can be expressed using plays alone (as suggested at the end of subsection 3.4).

Moreover, the ideal completion itself could be replaced by different order completions. This could yield the kind of nondeterministic models proposed in Bowler et al. [16] or the *interaction specification* monad of Koenig & Shao [32]. Importantly,

the *plays* used in game semantics correspond to the *join-irreducible strategies*.

This suggests that it may be possible to reconstruct the models mentioned above using variations on the *Bruns-Lakser completion*, presented for example in Bazerman and Puzio [14, §3]. This may require a better understanding of the ways initial algebra and terminal coalgebra constructions propagate [26, §2.5] through the adjunctions defined by order completions—this may also shed light on the relationship between the endofunctors $\hat{E}$ and E.

Ultimately, the goal would be to decouple the order-theoretic character of a given model (and the corresponding support of partial definition, infinite behaviors and nondeterminism), determined by the order completion used, from the structure of the interaction which the model captures, determined by the partially ordered set of terms to be completed.

4.2 Operations on signatures

The endofunctors associated with effect signatures per Definition 4 correspond exactly to the single-variable *polynomial* endofunctors over the category **Set**. Polynomial functors in general have been studied extensively. Single-variable polynomials on **Set** in particular have recently been a source of great interest in modeling dynamical systems [47], owing to their remarkable properties.

Specifically, the category **Poly** of single-variable polynomials on **Set** has all products ($\times$) and coproducts ($+$), a separate notion of tensor product ($\otimes$), with endofunctor composition ($\circ$) defining yet another monoidal structure. **Poly** is closed with respect to *both* the cartesian and tensor products, and even *co-closed* with respect to the tensor product. It is worth noting as well that the free monad construction E^* described in subsection 2.3 can be internalized as a free monoid monad in **Poly**.

Many of these structures also appear in the context of game semantics and linear logic. In **Poly**, they rely in large part on complete distributivity of the underlying category **Set**; as such it is unclear how they carry over to the context of $\mathbf{DCPO}_{\perp!}$ and Definition 9. But this suggests that despite the apparent simplicity of effect signatures as games, their expressive power can be significant.

4.3 Multi-sorted signatures

Sequential alternating games of the kind used in game semantics can be described using bipartite directed multigraphs [38]: vertices correspond to the possible phases or states of the game, and are partitioned into opponent and proponent states; edges out of a particular state correspond to the possible next moves, and the plays are paths through the graph.

In the case of effect signatures, there is only one proponent vertex. As such, the corresponding games are almost stateless: every time the proponent P is back in control, the game must be reiterated without any change to the rules. This is due to the *single-sorted* nature of effect signatures: while *arities* provide the opponent O with different sets of moves in different situations, the single *sort* does not permit the same flexibility for P.

From an algebraic perspective, lifting this restriction means generalizing the framework to multi-sorted signatures. This restores the symmetry between the two players, as emphasized by the following presentation.

Definition 14. *A* multi-sorted effect signature *is a tuple $E = \langle \bar{Q}, \bar{M}, \bar{\delta}, Q, M, \delta \rangle$. The components define:*

- *a set $\bar{Q}$ of* sorts *and a set Q of* arities*;*
- *for every sort $q \in \bar{Q}$ a set $\bar{M}_q$ of* function symbols *and for every $m \in \bar{M}_q$ an arity $\bar{\delta}_q(m) \in Q$;*
- *for every arity $r \in Q$ a set M_r of* argument positions *and for every $n \in M_r$ a sort $\delta_r(n) \in \bar{Q}$.*

The sorts (proponent states) and arities (opponent states) can both be understood as *types*, respectively for operations and argument tuples. The game alternates between a proponent choice of operation and an opponent choice of argument position.

To follow the blueprint laid out in section 3, we must assign endofunctors to multi-sorted signatures. These will be polynomial functors of multiple variables, hence we will be working in categories of Q- or $\bar{Q}$-indexed *tuples* of sets and functions. The term algebra can then be constructed using sets of mutually recursive terms and argument tuples, and we can use the ideal completion to obtain a strategy model. Note that we must also pick an initial sort (for costrategies) or arity (for strategies).

Again the connection with polynomial functors allows us to draw from a large body of existing work. For example, Hyvernat [30, 29] gives a model of linear logic based on polynomials of this form.

5 Conclusion

Although much work remains to be done, looking at game semantics through the prism of categorical algebra offers promising avenues of investigation. Multi-sorted signatures constitute a low-level representation for sequential alternating games. Characterizing existing forms of game semantics using algebraic tools could reveal interesting structures, and suggest general principles for the design of general-purpose models capable of accounting for the behaviors of a wide range of heterogeneous components.

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