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Marking Estimation of Petri Nets with Silent Transitions

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Abstract— **In this paper we deal with the problem of estimating the marking of a labeled Petri net system based on the observation of transitions labels. In particular, we assume that a certain number of transitions are labeled with the empty string ε, while a different label taken from a given alphabet is assigned to all the other transitions. Transitions labeled with the empty string are called *silent* because their firing cannot be observed. Under some technical assumptions on the structure of the $T_\varepsilon-$induced subnet, where T_ε denotes the set of silent transitions, we formally prove that the set of markings consistent with the observed word can be represented by a linear system with a fixed structure that does not depend on the length of the observed word.**

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we address the problem of estimating the marking of a Petri net (PN) whose set of transitions is partitioned in two sets: observable transitions whose firing can be detected by an external observer, and unobservable transitions, i.e., transitions labeled with the empty string ε whose firing cannot be detected.

This is a fundamental issue in theoretical *computer science* within the framework of nondeterministic language generators. In fact, in this context, the behaviour of a discrete event system (DES) is modeled by a *language*: the event set E is viewed as an alphabet, and a sequence of events from this alphabet forms a *word* (or a *string*) of events, that describes a particular evolution of the system. The state observer of a DES aims to provide an estimate of the system state based on the observation of the word of events. The initial state is usually assumed to be known but, on the contrary, it may be the case that the system dynamics is not perfectly known in the sense that it may be *nondeterministic*.

More precisely, the nondeterminism may be due to two different facts.

— *Silent events.* There may be events that cause a change in the state of the DES but that are not observable by an outside observer. Events of this kind are labeled with the empty string ε.

— *Undistinguishable events.* There may be events whose occurrence from a given state yields two or more new states. Such is the case if two or more transitions labeled with the same symbol in E are enabled at a given state.

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For DES modeled as finite automata, the most common way of solving the problem of partial observation is that of converting, using a standard *determinization* procedure, the nondeterministic finite automaton (NFA) into an equivalent deterministic finite automon (DFA) where: (i) each state of the DFA corresponds to a set of states of the NFA; (ii) the state reached on the DFA after the word w is observed, gives the set $\mathcal{C}(w)$ of *states consistent with the observed word* w.

However, there are some drawbacks in the above procedure. Firstly, each set $\mathcal{C}(w)$ must be exhaustively enumerated. Then, to compute $\mathcal{C}(w)$ we first need to compute $\mathcal{C}(w')$ for all prefixes $w' \preceq w$. Finally, if the NFA has n states, the DFA can have up to 2^n states.

In this paper we explore the possibility of using PN as discrete event models and address the observer design under the assumption that some transitions are labeled with the empty string ε, i.e., they are *silent*, while a different label is assigned to all the other transitions. Thus, if T is the set of transitions and T_ε is the set of silent transitions, all transitions in $T \setminus T_\varepsilon$ are *deterministic*.

We first observe that an analogous determinization procedure as that used in the case of automata, cannot be used in the PN framework. In fact, a nondeterministic PN cannot be converted into an equivalent deterministic PN, because of the strict inclusions [2]: $\mathcal{L}_{\rm det} \subsetneq \mathcal{L} \subsetneq \mathcal{L}_\lambda$ where $\mathcal{L}_{\rm det}$ is the set of deterministic PN languages; $\mathcal{L}$ is the set of λ-free PN languages, namely, languages accepted by nets where no transition is labeled with the empty string: the nondeterminism here is associated to undistinguishable events because two transitions may share the same label; $\mathcal{L}_\lambda$ is the set of arbitrary PN languages where a transition may also be labeled with the empty string: the nondeterminism here is associated both to silent events and to undistinguishable events.

If one considers the restricted class of bounded PN (i.e., nets with a finite state space), it is possible to use the above results on automata theory to compute a state observer based on partial event observation. More precisely, we can first construct the reachability graph of the Petri net system, that under the assumption of arbitrary labeling is a NFA G. Then we construct the DFA G' equivalent to the NFA G. Note however that the resulting observer G' is an automaton, not a Petri net, thus all advantages that may derive from initially modeling the DES with a Petri net vanish.

The main contribution of this paper is that of providing an original approach to build a state observer that does not require the construction of the reachability graph, and thus works for both bounded and unbounded PN. More precisely, we derive an efficient technique for characterizing the set of markings that are consistent with the actual observation w, namely $\mathcal{C}(w)$.

In particular, we make the following five assumptions: (A1) the net structure is known, (A2) the initial marking is known, (A3) the labels associated to the firing of transitions in $T \backslash T_\varepsilon$ can be observed, (A4) the $T_\varepsilon-$induced subnet of N is *acyclic*, (A5) the $T_\varepsilon-$induced subnet is backward conflict free, i.e., all silent transitions have no common output place.

Under these assumptions, we show that the set of consistent markings can be written as the solution of a linear system with a fixed structure that depends on the value of a vector $M_b \in \mathbb{N}^m$, called the *basis marking*, that can be recursively computed. The main advantage of the proposed approach is that we need not exhaustively enumerate all consistent markings.

We addressed a similar problem in [4], [5]. Note however that in [4], [5] we dealt with λ-free labeled PN, i.e., with PN where no transition is labeled with the empty string, and the nondeterminism was due to undistinguishable events. Under the assumption that the nondeterministic transitions are *contact-free*[1], we gave a linear algebraic characterization of the set of consistent markings that depends on some parameters that can be recursively computed.

Let us finally observe that a similar approach that uses a logical formalism rather than linear programming was also presented by Benasser [1]. This author has studied the possibility of defining the set of markings reached firing a "partially specified" step of transitions using logical formulas, without having to enumerate this set. Other authors [9] have also discussed the problem of estimating the marking of a Petri net using a mix of transition firings and place observations. Zhang and Holloway [11] used a Controlled Petri Net model for forbidden state avoidance under partial *event* observation with the assumption that the initial marking be known. Finally, the notion of unobserved reach function in the work by Heymann and Lin [6], dealing with on-line control of partially observed DES, is related to the basis marking we introduce in this paper.

II. Background on Petri nets

In this section we recall the formalism used in the paper. For more details on Petri nets we address to [10].

A *Place/Transition net* (P/T net) is a structure $N = (P, T, Pre, Post)$, where P is a set of m places; T is a set of n transitions; $Pre: P \times T \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ and $Post: P \times T \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ are the pre– and $post$– incidence functions that specify the arcs; $C = Post - Pre$ is the incidence matrix.

A *marking* is a vector $M: P \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ that assigns to each place of a P/T net a non–negative integer number of tokens, represented by black dots. We denote $M(p)$ the marking of place p. A P/T *system* or *net system* $\langle N, M_0 \rangle$ is a net N with an initial marking M_0.

A transition t is enabled at M iff $M \geq Pre(\cdot, t)$ and may fire yielding the marking $M' = M + C(\cdot, t)$. We write $M\ [\sigma\rangle$ to denote that the sequence of transitions $\sigma = t_{j_1} \cdots t_{j_k}$ is enabled at M, and we write $M\ [\sigma\rangle\ M'$ to denote that the firing of σ yields M'. We also denote $\vec{\sigma}\ :\ T \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ the *firing vector* associated to a sequence σ, i.e., $\sigma(t) = k$ if the transition t is contained k times in σ.

A marking M is *reachable* in $\langle N, M_0 \rangle$ iff there exists a firing sequence σ such that $M_0\ [\sigma\rangle\ M$. The set of all markings reachable from M_0 defines the *reachability set* of $\langle N, M_0 \rangle$ and is denoted $R(N, M_0)$. Finally, we denote $PR(N, M_0)$ the *potentially reachable set*, i.e., the set of all markings $M \in \mathbb{N}^m$ for which there exists a vector $\vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^n$ that satisfies the *state equation* $M = M_0 + C \cdot \vec{y}$, i.e., $PR(N, M_0) = \{M \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid \exists\, \vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^n : M = M_0 + C \cdot \vec{y}\}$. It holds that $R(N, M_0) \subseteq PR(N, M_0)$.

A Petri net having no directed circuits is called *acyclic*.For this subclass the following result holds.

Theorem 1. *Let N be an acyclic Petri net.*

(i) If the vector $\vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^n$ satisfies the equation $M_0 + C \cdot \vec{y} \geq 0$ there exists a firing sequence σ firable from marking M_0 and such that $\vec{\sigma} = \vec{y}$.

(ii) A marking M is reachable from M_0 if and only if there exists a non negative integer solution $\vec{\sigma}$ satisfying the state equation $M = M_0 + C \cdot \vec{\sigma}$, i.e., $R(N, M_0) = PR(N, M_0)$.

Proof: Note that, obviously, (i) implies (ii). These results follow from Theorem 16 of [10]. In effect, the statement of the theorem in [10] is equivalent to (ii) but the result is proved with an argument that also show that (i) holds. □

A *labeling function* $L : T \rightarrow E \cup \{\varepsilon\}$ assigns to each transition $t \in T$ either a symbol from a given alphabet E or the empty string ε.

We denote as T_ε the set of transitions whose label is ε, i.e., $T_\varepsilon = \{t \in T \mid L(t) = \varepsilon\}$.

In this paper we assume that the same label $e \in E$ cannot be associated to more than one transition. Thus, being the labeling function restricted to $T \setminus T_\varepsilon$ an isomorphism, with no loss of generality we assume $E = T \setminus T_\varepsilon$.

We denote as w the word of events associated to the sequence σ, i.e., $w = L(\sigma)$. Note that the length of a sequence σ (denoted $|\sigma|$) is always greater or equal than the length of the corresponding word w (denoted $|w|$). In fact, if σ contains k' transitions labeled ε then $|\sigma| = k' + |w|$.

Moreover, we denote as σ_0 the sequence of null length and ε the empty word. We use the notation $w_i \preccurlyeq w$ to denote the generic prefix of w of length $i \leq k$, where k is the length of w.

Definition 2. *Given a net $N = (P, T, Pre, Post)$, and a subset $T' \subseteq T$ of its transitions, we define the $T'-$*induced

[1]Nondeterministic transitions are contact-free if for any two nondeterministic transitions t and t' the set of input and output places of t cannot intersect the set of input and output places of t'.

subnet of N *as the new net* $N' = (P, T', Pre', Post')$ *where* $Pre', Post'$ *are the restriction of* $Pre, Post$ *to* T'. *The net* N' *can be thought as obtained from* N *removing all transitions in* $T \setminus T'$. *We also write* $N' \prec_{T'} N$. ■

III. Preliminary results

Let $\langle N, M_0 \rangle$ be a net system with incidence matrix $C \in \mathbb{Z}^{m \times n}$ and let $\tilde{M} \in \mathbb{N}^m$. We define

$$\Sigma(N, M_0, \tilde{M}) = \left\{ \vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^n \mid M_0 + C\vec{y} \geq \tilde{M} \right\}$$

as the set of firing vectors that potentially correspond to sequences that lead from M_0 to a marking greater or equal to $\tilde{M}$. To simplify the notation, when no ambiguity may result we write Σ to denote this set.

The set $(\Sigma, \leq)$ is a *poset* (partially ordered set) where $\leq$ is the usual relation on $\mathbb{N}^n$ defined as:

$$\vec{y} \leq \vec{y}\,' \qquad \Longleftrightarrow \qquad (\forall j = 1, \ldots, n) \quad y_j \leq y'_j.$$

Given two elements $\vec{y}\,', \vec{y}\,'' \in \Sigma$ we denote by $\oplus$ the componentwise $\min$ operator, i.e.,

$$\vec{y} = \vec{y}\,' \oplus \vec{y}\,'' \quad \Longleftrightarrow \quad (\forall j = 1, \ldots, n) \;\; y_j = \min\{y'_j, y''_j\}.$$

Theorem 3. *If* $N = (P, T, Pre, Post)$ *is a* backward conflict free *net and if* $\Sigma \neq \emptyset$, *then* $(\Sigma, \leq)$ *has infimal* [2] *element*

$$\vec{y}^{\;\inf} = \bigoplus_{\vec{y} \in \Sigma} \vec{y}.$$

Proof: It is sufficient to show that the set Σ is closed under the $\oplus$ operator. To show this, assume $\vec{y}\,', \vec{y}\,'' \in \Sigma$. Then for all $p_i \in P$ the two vectors satisfy

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} M_0(p_i) + C(p_i, \cdot)\vec{y}\,' \geq \tilde{M}(p_i) \\ M_0(p_i) + C(p_i, \cdot)\vec{y}\,'' \geq \tilde{M}(p_i). \end{array} \right. \tag{1}$$

Note that if N is *backward conflict free* (BFC), each place p_i has at most one input transition t_{j_i} as shown in Figure 1. Thus the row $C(p_i, \cdot)$ of the incidence matrix associated to place p_i contains at most one positive element $C(p_i, t_{j_i}) = \alpha_{i,j_i} > 0$, while for all $j \neq j_i$ it holds $C(p_i, t_j) = -\alpha_{i,j} \leq 0$. If no elements of $C(p_i, \cdot)$ is positive, then we define $j_i = n + 1$ and $\alpha_{i,j_i} = 0$.

Thus for all $p_i \in P$ we can rewrite equation (1) as follows:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \alpha_{i,j_i} y'_{j_i} \geq \tilde{M}(p_i) - M_0(p_i) + \displaystyle\sum_{j=1, j \neq j_i}^{n} \alpha_{i,j} y'_j \\ \alpha_{i,j_i} y''_{j_i} \geq \tilde{M}(p_i) - M_0(p_i) + \displaystyle\sum_{j=1, j \neq j_i}^{n} \alpha_{i,j} y''_j. \end{array} \right. \tag{2}$$

[2]The infimal element of a poset $(A, \preccurlyeq)$ is an element $a^{\inf} \in A$ such that for any another $a' \in A$ it holds $a^{\inf} \preccurlyeq a'$. If the infimal element exists it is unique.

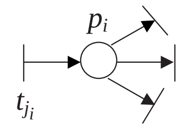

Fig. 1. *A place of a BFC net.*

Let us now consider a vector $\vec{y} = \vec{y}\,' \oplus \vec{y}\,''$. For all $p_i \in P$ it holds:

$$\begin{array}{ll} \alpha_{i,j_i} y_{j_i} & = \min\{\alpha_{i,j_i} y'_{j_i}, \alpha_{i,j_i} y''_{j_i}\} \\ & \geq \tilde{M}(p_i) - M_0(p_i) + \\ & \quad + \min\left\{ \sum_{j=1, j \neq j_i}^{n} \alpha_{i,j} y'_j, \sum_{j=1, j \neq j_i}^{n} \alpha_{i,j} y''_j \right\} \\ & \geq \tilde{M}(p_i) - M_0(p_i) + \displaystyle\sum_{j=1, j \neq j_i}^{n} \alpha_{i,j} y_j, \end{array} \tag{3}$$

i.e., $\vec{y} \in \Sigma$. □

Remark 4. *We want to point out where the assumption that* N *be backward conflict free is essential in the previous proof. Assume that a place* p_i *has two input transitions* t_{j_i} *and* t_{k_i}. *Then as we write equation (2) in terms of positive elements we need to write expressions of the form:*

$$\alpha_{i,j_i} y'_{j_i} + \alpha_{i,k_i} y'_{k_i} \geq \tilde{M}(p_i) - M_0(p_i) + \sum_{j=1, j \notin \{j_i, k_i\}}^{n} \alpha_{i,j} y'_j$$

and now when we consider vector $\vec{y}$ *it holds*

$$\begin{array}{c} \alpha_{i,j_i} y_{j_i} + \alpha_{i,k_i} y_{k_i} \leq \\ \min\{\alpha_{i,j_i} y'_{j_i} + \alpha_{i,k_i} y'_{k_i}, \alpha_{i,j_i} y''_{j_i} + \alpha_{i,k_i} y''_{k_i}\} \geq \\ \tilde{M}(p_i) - M_0(p_i) + \sum_{j=1, j \notin \{j_i, k_i\}}^{n} \alpha_{i,j} y_j \end{array}$$

i.e., we cannot conclude that $\vec{y} \in \Sigma$. ■

IV. Problem statement

In this paper we deal with the problem of estimating the marking of a net system $\langle N, M_0 \rangle$ whose marking cannot be directly observed. The following properties of the system will be assumed.

(A1) The structure of the net N is known.
(A2) The initial marking M_0 is known.
(A3) The labels associated to the firing of transitions in $T \setminus T_\varepsilon$ can be observed.

Note that since we assumed that the same label $e \in E$ cannot be assigned to more than one transition, assumption (A3) implies that transitions labeled with a symbol in E are *deterministic*. On the contrary, transitions labeled ε are *silent* because their firing cannot be observed.

After the word w of symbols in E has been observed, we define the set $\mathcal{C}(w)$ of w-consistent markings as the set of all markings in which the system may be, given the observed behaviour.

Definition 5. *Given an observed word* w*, the set of* w*-*consistent markings *is*

$$\mathcal{C}(w) = \{M \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid \exists \textit{ a sequence of transitions } \sigma : M_0[\sigma\rangle M \textit{ and } L(\sigma) = w\}. \tag{4}$$

■

Example 6. Let us consider the Petri net system in Figure 2.a whose initial marking is equal to $M_0 = [1\ 1\ 0\ 0]^T$ and whose alphabet is $E = \{a, b\}$. The resulting reachability graph is shown in Figure 2.b where for simplicity of notation with have denoted with thick labeled arcs the arcs corresponding to the firing of transitions labeled with a symbol in E, while with thin non-labeled arcs we have denoted the arcs corresponding to silent transitions.

Assume that no event is initially observed, i.e., $\sigma = \sigma_0$ and $w = \varepsilon$. By definition, the set of markings that are consistent with the empty word is $\mathcal{C}(\varepsilon) = \{[1\ 1\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [1\ 0\ 1\ 0]^T\}$. In fact two different cases may have occurred: either no transition has fired or the silent transition t_1 has fired.

Now, let us first assume that transition t_4 fires. Its firing can be observed being $L(t_4) = a \in E$. In such a case the set of markings that is consistent with the observed event a is $\mathcal{C}(a) = \{[0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 1\ 1\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 0\ 2\ 0]^T\}$. In fact, five different sequences of transitions σ_i, $i = 1, \cdots, 5$, may have fired, namely, $\sigma_1 = t_4$, $\sigma_2 = t_4t_1$, $\sigma_3 = t_1t_4$, $\sigma_4 = t_4t_1t_1$, $\sigma_5 = t_1t_4t_1$, and for all of them $L(\sigma_i) = a$. Moreover, $M_0[\sigma_1\rangle\ [0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T$, $M_0[\sigma_2\rangle\ [0\ 1\ 1\ 0]^T$, $M_0[\sigma_3\rangle\ [0\ 1\ 1\ 0]^T$, $M_0[\sigma_4\rangle\ [0\ 0\ 2\ 0]^T$ and $M_0[\sigma_5\rangle\ [0\ 0\ 2\ 0]^T$.

On the contrary, let us assume that the only observed event is b. In such a case the set of markings that is consistent with the observed event b is $\mathcal{C}(b) = \{[1\ 1\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [1\ 0\ 1\ 0]^T,\ [1\ 0\ 0\ 1]^T,\ [2\ 0\ 0\ 0]^T\}$. In particular, four different sequences of transitions σ_i, $i = 1, \cdots, 4$, may have fired, namely, $\sigma_1 = t_1t_5$, $\sigma_2 = t_1t_5t_3$, $\sigma_3 = t_1t_5t_2$, $\sigma_4 = t_1t_5t_3t_1$, and for all of them $L(\sigma_i) = b$. Moreover, $M_0[\sigma_1\rangle\ [1\ 0\ 0\ 1]^T$, $M_0[\sigma_2\rangle\ [1\ 1\ 0\ 0]^T$, $M_0[\sigma_3\rangle\ [2\ 0\ 0\ 0]^T$, and $M_0[\sigma_4\rangle\ [1\ 0\ 1\ 0]^T$. ■

Let us finally observe that the cardinality of the set of consistent markings may either increase or decrease as the length of the observed word increases.

Example 7. Let us consider again the Petri net system in Figure 2.a. As already said before, if we only observe the event a, the corresponding set of consistent markings is $\mathcal{C}(a) = \{[0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 1\ 1\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 0\ 2\ 0]^T\}$, whose cardinality is equal to 3.

If the sequence of observed events is ab, then $\mathcal{C}(ab) = \{[1\ 1\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [1\ 0\ 1\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 1\ 1\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 0\ 2\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 1\ 0\ 1]^T,\ [0\ 0\ 1\ 1]^T\}$ whose cardinality is equal to 7.

Finally, if the sequence of observed events is aba, then $\mathcal{C}(aba) = \mathcal{C}(a)$, i.e., its cardinality is equal to 3. ■

V. A SOLUTION BASED ON DFA COMPUTATION

The above simple example clearly shows that the problem of determining the set of markings that are consistent with an observed word may not be an easy task, because it requires an exhaustive enumeration of the sequences of transitions that may have actually fired.

When dealing with *bounded* Petri nets the most natural way of solving this problem consists in the computation of the *deterministic finite state automaton* (DFA) equivalent to the *nondeterministic finite state automaton* (NFA) representing the reachability graph of the Petri net system under consideration.

Example 8. Let us consider again the bounded Petri net system in Figure 2.a whose reachability graph is a NFA due to the presence of ε. As well known from the literature [8], there exists a systematic procedure that enables us to compute the DFA equivalent to a NFA. In particular, in the case at hand we obtain the DFA reported in Figure 2.c. At this point it is immediate to compute the set of consistent markings and verify that $\mathcal{C}(\varepsilon) = \{[1\ 1\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [1\ 0\ 1\ 0]^T\}$, $\mathcal{C}(a) = \{[0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 1\ 1\ 0]^T,\ [0\ 0\ 2\ 0]^T\}$ and $\mathcal{C}(b) = \{[1\ 1\ 0\ 0]^T,\ [1\ 0\ 1\ 0]^T,\ [1\ 0\ 0\ 1]^T,\ [2\ 0\ 0\ 0]^T\}$. ■

Note however, that this procedure is not efficient from a computational point of view because for all initial markings we first need to compute the reachability graph of the Petri net system, i.e., a NFA, and then convert it into a DFA. Moreover, it can only be applied to bounded Petri net systems. Finally, even when applicable, it does not provide an algebraic characterization of the set of consistent markings, and this may be an essential requirement when the observer is included in a closed-loop system [3].

VI. AN ALGEBRAIC CHARACTERIZATION OF $\mathcal{C}(w)$

We assume that the following conditions are verified.

(A4) The $T_\varepsilon-$induced subnet of N is *acyclic*.
(A5) The $T_\varepsilon-$induced subnet is backward conflict free, i.e., all silent transitions have no common output place.

Assumption (A4) implies that there cannot be repetitive sequences of unobservable transitions that may fire indefinitely thus excluding problems related to divergence (or livelock) [7]. We formally prove that under assumptions (A1) to (A5), a fixed number of constraints, not depending on the length of the observed word w, may be used to describe the set of w consistent markings. In particular, we formally prove that:

$$\mathcal{M}(M_{b,w}) \triangleq \{M \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M = M_{b,w} + C_\varepsilon\ \vec{y},\ \ \vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^{n_\varepsilon}\} \tag{5}$$

is the set of w consistent markings, i.e., $\mathcal{M}(M_{b,w}) = \mathcal{C}(w)$, where $M_{b,w}$ is appropriately computed using the following recursive algorithm.

Algorithm 9 ($M_{b,w}$ computation).
1. Let $w = \varepsilon$ and $M_{b,w} = M_0$.
2. Wait until an event e is observed.
Let t be the transition such that $L(t) = e$.
3. Set $\vec{y}^{\ inf} = \vec{0} \in \mathbb{N}^{n_\varepsilon}$
While there exists a p_i such that
$M_{b,w}(p_i) < Pre(p_i, t)$ do

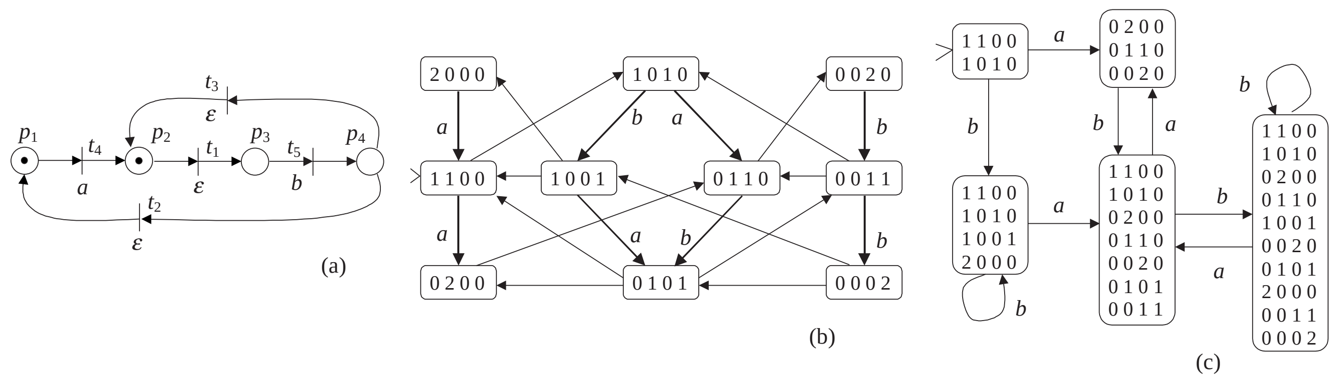

Fig. 2. *(a) The Petri net system considered in Example 6. (b) The NFA representing its reachability graph. (c) The DFA associated to the NFA.*

Look for the (unique) silent transition $t_{\varepsilon,i}$ that inputs in p_i

Let $\varrho = \left\lceil \dfrac{Pre(p_i,t) - M_{b,w}(p_i)}{Post(p_i, t_{\varepsilon,i})} \right\rceil$

Update $\vec{y}^{\ inf} = \vec{y}^{\ inf} + \varrho\, \vec{e}_{\varepsilon,i}$ where $\vec{e}_{\varepsilon,i}$ is the normal basis $i-th$ element of $\mathbb{N}^{n_\varepsilon}$.

endwhile

Let $M_{b,we} = M_{b,w} + C_\varepsilon \ \vec{y}^{\ inf} + C(\cdot,t)$ and $w = we$.

4. Goto 2. ■

Note that the main idea behind the proposed algebraic characterization originates from the consideration that, given the above assumptions (A4) and (A5), we can always describe the set of markings that are consistent with an observed word w as the set of markings that can be reached from a *basis marking* $M_{b,w}$, depending on w, by simply firing silent transitions. Using Algorithm 9 the basis marking $M_{b,w}$ is computed as the marking that is reached from the initial one by firing all the observed deterministic transitions and all those silent transitions whose firing is strictly necessary to enable the observed sequence. Thus, when no transition firing is observed, we take $M_{b,\varepsilon} = M_0$.

As formally proved in the following, the existence and unicity of the basis marking $M_{b,w}$ follows from Theorem 3. In fact, being the $T_\varepsilon-$induced subnet acyclic, if we consider $\Sigma = \Sigma(N, M_{b,v}, Pre(\cdot,t))$, where $M_{b,v}$ is the basis marking before the last observed transition t, Σ represents the set of firing vectors that correspond to sequences of silent transitions that lead from $M_{b,v}$ to a marking greater or equal than $Pre(\cdot,t)$, i.e., to a marking that enables t. By Theorem 3 we know for sure that the infimal element $\vec{y}^{\ \mathrm{inf}}$ of Σ exists and is unique. Therefore we update the basis marking taking into account that, before the firing of t, a certain number of silent transitions, to whom it corresponds the firing vector $\vec{y}^{\ \mathrm{inf}}$, have fired to enable t.

We finally remark that the above Algorithm 9 stops after a finite number of steps that is at most equal to the number m of places.

Example 10. Let us consider again the Petri net system in Figure 2.a. By definition the basis marking when no event is observed is $M_{b,\varepsilon} = M_0$.

Let us first assume that the event a is observed, i.e., transition t_4 has fired. The infimal vector $\vec{y}^{\ inf}$ is null, and according to Algorithm 9, the basis marking is updated to $M_{b,a} = M_{b,\varepsilon} + C(\cdot,t_2) = [0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T$.

Now, assume that the event b is observed, i.e., transition t_5 has fired. In this case $\vec{y}^{\ inf} = [1\ 0\ 0]^T$ because we know for sure that the silent transition t_1 has fired at least once to enable t_5, and the basis marking is updated to $M_{b,ab} = M_{b,a} + C_\varepsilon \cdot \vec{y}^{\ inf} + C(\cdot,t_5) = [0\ 1\ 0\ 1]^T$. ■

Now, let us prove an important property of acyclic Petri nets that will be useful in the following.

Lemma 11. *Let us consider an* acyclic *Petri net system $\langle N, M_0\rangle$. Assume that two firing sequences σ' and σ'' are enabled at M_0 and assume that σ'' is still enabled after the firing of σ'. Then $M_0[\sigma'\sigma''\rangle \bar{M}$ and $M_0[\sigma''\rangle M'' \implies (\exists \sigma'_{eq} :\ \vec{\sigma}'_{eq} = \vec{\sigma}')\ \ M''[\sigma'_{eq}\rangle \bar{M}$.*

Proof: The first assumption $M_0[\sigma'\sigma''\rangle \bar{M}$ implies that $\bar{M} = M_0 + C\cdot\vec{\sigma}' + C\cdot\vec{\sigma}'' \geq \vec{0}$, with $\vec{\sigma}', \vec{\sigma}'' \geq \vec{0}$, while the second assumption $M_0[\sigma''\rangle M''$ implies that $M'' = M_0 + C\cdot\vec{\sigma}''$. Thus, $M'' + C\cdot\vec{\sigma}' = \bar{M} \geq 0$.

By Theorem 1, item (i), the above equation implies that there exists a firing sequence σ'_{eq} with $\vec{\sigma}' = \vec{\sigma}'_{eq}$ such that $M''[\sigma'_{eq}\rangle \bar{M}$, thus proving the statement. □

The above lemma ensures that if σ'' is enabled after the firing of σ', a sequence σ'_{eq} that is *equivalent* to σ' — in the sense that it is just a permutation of σ' — is enabled after the firing of σ''.

Theorem 12. *Let us consider a Petri net system $\langle N, M_0\rangle$ and let $L : T \to E \cup \{\varepsilon\}$ be its labeling function. Assume that assumptions (A4) and (A5) are satisfied. Then, for all words $w \in (T \setminus T_\varepsilon)^*$ the equality $\mathcal{C}(w) = \mathcal{M}(M_{b,w})$ holds, where $M_{b,w}$ is computed using Algorithm 9.*

Proof: We prove this by induction on the length of the observed word.

(Basis Step.) If $w = \varepsilon$ then $M_{b,w} = M_0$ and

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{M}(M_{b,\varepsilon}) &= \mathcal{M}(M_0)\\ &= \{M \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M = M_0 + C_\varepsilon\ \vec{y},\ \vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^{n_\varepsilon}\}\\ &\supseteq \{M \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M_0[\sigma_\varepsilon\rangle M,\ \sigma_\varepsilon \in {T_\varepsilon}^*\}\\ &= \mathcal{C}(\varepsilon).\end{aligned}$$

If N_ε is acyclic we can replace $\supseteq$ by $=$ according to Theorem 1, item (ii).

(Inductive Step.) Assume that $\mathcal{C}(v) = \mathcal{M}(M_{b,v})$ for a generic word $v \in E^*$.

We prove that $\mathcal{C}(ve) = \mathcal{M}(M_{b,ve})$ with $e \in E$.

We first observe that, if $t = L^{-1}(e)$ then

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{C}(ve) &= \{M'' \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M \in \mathcal{C}(v),\ M \geq Pre(\cdot,t),\\ &\qquad M[t\rangle M'[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M'',\ \sigma'_\varepsilon \in {T_\varepsilon}^*\}\\ &= \{M'' \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M \in \mathcal{M}(M_{b,v}),\ M \geq Pre(\cdot,t),\\ &\qquad M[t\rangle M'[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M'',\ \sigma'_\varepsilon \in {T_\varepsilon}^*\}\\ &= \{M'' \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M = M_{b,v} + C_\varepsilon\ \vec{y},\ \vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^\varepsilon,\\ &\qquad M \geq Pre(\cdot,t),\ M[t\rangle M'[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M'',\\ &\qquad \sigma'_\varepsilon \in {T_\varepsilon}^*\}\\ &\supseteq \{M'' \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M_{b,v}[\sigma_\varepsilon\rangle M[t\rangle M'[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M'',\\ &\qquad \sigma_\varepsilon, \sigma'_\varepsilon \in {T_\varepsilon}^*\}.\end{aligned}$$

If N_ε is acyclic we can replace $\supseteq$ by $=$ according to Theorem 1, item (ii).

Now, let us notice that when a new transition t is observed, using Algorithm 9, we first update the basis marking $M_{b,v}$ to $M'_{b,v} = M_{b,v} + C_\varepsilon\ \vec{y}^{\ \inf}$ where $\vec{y}^{\ \inf}$ is the infimal vector of $\Sigma(N, M_{b,v}, Pre(\cdot,t))$. Moreover, being by assumption the $T_\varepsilon-$induced net BCF, by virtue of Theorem 3, $\vec{y}^{\ \inf}$ is unique for all $t \in T \setminus T_\varepsilon$ and for all $M_{b,v} \in \mathbb{N}^m$. Thus by definition $M'_{b,v}$ is the marking that can be obtained from $M_{b,v}$ by simply firing those transitions that are strictly necessary to enable t. Clearly, if $M_{b,v}$ already enables t, then $\vec{y}^{\ \inf} = \vec{0}$.

Furthermore, being N_ε acyclic,

$$M = M'_{b,v} + C_\varepsilon\ \vec{y} \geq Pre(\cdot,t)$$

implies that

$$\exists\ \sigma_\varepsilon \in {T_\varepsilon}^*\ :\ \vec{\sigma}_\varepsilon = \vec{y}\ \text{ and }\ M'_{b,v}[\sigma_\varepsilon\rangle M[t\rangle M'.$$

Now, we first prove that $\mathcal{C}(ve) \subseteq \mathcal{M}(M_{b,ve})$. In fact, given any firing sequence ${\sigma_\varepsilon}^{\inf}$ to whom it corresponds a firing vector equal to $\vec{y}^{\ \inf}$, i.e., ${\vec{\sigma}_\varepsilon}^{\inf} = \vec{y}^{\ \inf}$, it holds

$$\begin{aligned}&M'' \in \mathcal{C}(ve)\\ &\quad\Leftrightarrow M_{b,v}[{\sigma_\varepsilon}^{\inf}\rangle M'_{b,v}[\sigma_\varepsilon\rangle M[t\rangle M'[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M''\\ &\quad\Rightarrow \text{ by lemma 11, } (\exists \sigma_{\varepsilon,eq} \text{ with } \vec{\sigma}_{\varepsilon,eq} = \vec{\sigma}_\varepsilon)\\ &\qquad M_{b,v}[{\sigma_\varepsilon}^{\inf}\rangle M'_{b,v}[t\rangle M_{b,ve}[\sigma_{\varepsilon,eq}\rangle M'[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M''\\ &\quad\Rightarrow M_{b,ve}[\sigma_{\varepsilon,eq}\rangle M'[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M''\\ &\quad\Leftrightarrow M_{b,ve}[\sigma''_\varepsilon\rangle M'',\ \ \sigma''_\varepsilon = \sigma_{\varepsilon,eq}\ \sigma'_\varepsilon\\ &\quad\Leftrightarrow M'' = M_{b,ve} + C_\varepsilon\ \vec{\sigma}''_\varepsilon\\ &\quad\Leftrightarrow M'' \in \mathcal{M}(M_{b,ve}).\end{aligned}$$

We finally prove that $\mathcal{M}(M_{b,ve}) \subseteq \mathcal{C}(ve)$. In fact,

$$\begin{aligned}M'' \in \mathcal{M}(M_{b,ve}) &\Leftrightarrow M'' = M_{b,ve} + C_\varepsilon \vec{y}\ '\\ &\Leftrightarrow \text{ (by assumption (A4))}\\ &\qquad \exists \sigma'_\varepsilon \in T^*_\varepsilon\ :\ M_{b,ve}[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M''\\ &\Leftrightarrow M_{b,v}[{\sigma_\varepsilon}^{\inf}\rangle M'_{b,v}[t\rangle M_{b,ve}[\sigma'_\varepsilon\rangle M'',\\ &\qquad M_{b,v} \in \mathcal{C}(v)\end{aligned}$$

where ${\sigma_\varepsilon}^{\inf}$ is any firing sequence such that ${\vec{\sigma}_\varepsilon}^{\inf} = \vec{y}^{\ \inf}$. Therefore by definition $M'' \in \mathcal{C}(ve)$, thus proving the statement. □

Example 13. Let us consider again the Petri net system in Figure 2.a. In the previous Example 10 we computed that $M_{b,a} = [0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T$. This means that $\mathcal{M}(M_{b,a}) = \{M \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M = M_{b,a} + C_\varepsilon\ \vec{y},\ \ \vec{y} \in \mathbb{N}^3\}$ is the set of consistent markings. The above set can be also be rewritten as $\mathcal{M}(M_{b,a}) = \{M \in \mathbb{N}^m \mid M = [y_2\ \ 2{-}y_1{+}y_2\ \ y_1\ \ {-}y_2{-}y_3]^T,\ [y_1\ y_2\ y_3]^T \in \mathbb{N}^3\}$, thus $y_1 \in \{0,1,2\}$, $y_2 = y_3 = 0$, and $\mathcal{M}(M_{b,a}) = \{[0\ 2\ 0\ 0]^T, [0\ 1\ 1]^T, [0\ 0\ 2\ 0]^T\}$ that coincides with the set of consistent markings computed via the DFA in Figure 2.c. The same reasoning can be repeated for any other word of events. ■

VII. Conclusions and future work

The main contribution of this paper is that of providing a marking estimation procedure for nondeterministic labeled Petri nets, where the nondeterminism is due to the presence of transitions labeled with the empty sting ε. Under some technical assumptions on the structure of the $T_\varepsilon-$induced net, we formally proved that the set of markings consistent with an observed word can be described by a constraint set of linear inequalities that has a fixed structure that does not change as the length of the observed sequence increases.

We plan to extend our results in several ways. Firstly, we plan to modify the structure of the constraint set to also take into account the case that the initial marking is not known. Then we want to extend this approach taking simultaneously into account the case in which the nondeterminism is due to silent transitions and the case of nondeterministic transitions that share the same label.

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