

# Deconstructing the Database

- Speaker: Rich Hickey
- Conference: QCon 2012 - Nov 2012
- Video: <http://infoq.com/presentations/Deconstructing-Database>
- Slides: [https://qconsf.com/sf2012/dl/qcon-sanfran-2012/slides/RichHickey\\_DeconstructingTheDatabase.pdf](https://qconsf.com/sf2012/dl/qcon-sanfran-2012/slides/RichHickey_DeconstructingTheDatabase.pdf)

[ This video recording begins with Rich speaking mid-sentence. The first slide in the recording is the 3rd one, not counting his title slide, in the slides at the link above, so there is not a lot missing from the video.

This transcript includes text versions of those first two slides, but whatever Rich said while presenting them is not here. ]

[ This slide is not in the video recording. ]

slide title: What is Datomic?

- + A new database
- + A sound model of `_information_`, with time
- + Provides `_database` as a value to applications
- + Bring `_declarative programming_` to applications
- + Focus on reducing complexity

[ This slide is also not in the video recording. ]

slide title: DB Complexity

- + Stateful
- + Same query, different results
  - + no basis
- + Over there
- + 'Update' poorly defined
  - + Places

... the way we think about update, and in fact Datomic does not consider update that way.

[Time 0:00:10]

slide title: Update

- + What does update mean?
- + Does the new replace the old?
- + Granularity? new \_\_\_\_ replace the old \_\_\_\_
- + Visibility?

So if we look at update, I think we have a fundamental question as to what does it mean to update something? If you update someone's email address, you do not actually change one email address into another email address. There is a new piece of information, which is that someone has changed their email address.

But most of the systems we work with allocate a place for the email address, and updating means going to that place and erasing it, and putting something different there.

It is a fundamental premise of this system, and the designs of systems like it, that we stop doing that. That we stop doing place-oriented programming, and move to a notion of programming that is about information accretion.

And there is always a question of granularity as well. I think as we move to these new storages, we have keys and values. And we have also devolved from what might have been a more nuanced thing in a relational model, to something where we get a blob at a key. And then we have this problem of what is in the blob, and how big is that?

Or you can lift it up. A column store may let you modify a row, or a SQL database may let you modify a set of things transactionally. But that whole notion of what is the granularity of update is an open question for every database system that you look at.

And directly tied into that is the notion of visibility. If I make a change at a certain granularity, do you see that at the same granularity, or not? Can you see it while it is happening? That is the isolation question. When I am done, do you see its entirety, or can you see pieces of it? And that is a consistency question that is sort of orthogonal to the notion of consistency we heard about in the keynote this morning.

[ The keynote talk for QCon 2012 in San Francisco, where this talk by Rich Hickey was given, was this: Glenn Vanderburg, “Real Software Engineering” [https://qconsf.com/sf2012/sf2012/presentation/Opening%2bKeynote\\_%2bGlennVanderburg](https://qconsf.com/sf2012/sf2012/presentation/Opening%2bKeynote_%2bGlennVanderburg) ]

Video: <https://www.infoq.com/presentations/Software-Engineering>

Several instances of this talk that Glenn has given: <http://vanderburg.org/speaking/#rse> ]

Everybody can see the same set of data that does not actually satisfy our application’s notion of what it means for the data to be consistent. And that is consistency by CAP, but not consistency by business requirements. And the two actually both matter. So the visibility of consistent change is something we have to concern ourselves with.

[Time 0:02:15]

**slide title: Manifestations**

- + Wrong programs
- + Scaling problems
- + Round-trip fears
- + Fear of overloading server
- + Coupling, e.g. questions with reporting

When we get this wrong, which we do quite often, we have lots of problems. We have programs that are simply wrong. They do not produce the right results. They do not do the right things.

We have difficulty scaling. I think the other thing I want to talk about today is: how can we reach ... We have had a lot of talks about: just adopt eventual consistency and we get all this great stuff. The people who are left saying, “I would like consistency”, well you have that old database thing. Where are the choices in between the monolith and eventual consistency?

And I do believe several speakers today have talked about: it is a spectrum. So this is about addressing some points in the middle of that spectrum.

We have problems of round trips. We have problems of overloading the monolithic servers that we want to address.

I am not going to talk about the other point.

[Time 0:03:05]

slide title: Consistency and Scale

- + What's possible?
- + Distributed redundancy and consistency?
- + Elasticity
- + Inconsistency huge source of complexity

[ There is a small figure on this slide, but it is so small that it is not clear one is missing out by not seeing it. ]

The other thing that Datomic tries to pursue is this question of: if I want consistency, do I have to give up all of the new research that has taught us about these great properties of these stores like Dynamo, and things like that? What is possible? Can we combine transactional components with redundant distributed storages, and get hybrid systems that have some of the best qualities of each?

Can we get elasticity in query and storage? We have proof examples of elasticity of storage. That is something that we take for granted now, outside of monolithic databases. But can we get the same elasticity for query?

And finally, there are times when consistency matters, and I think it is easy to say, "The real world is inconsistent", and thing like that. But there is a lot of coordination in the real world as well. And again, there is the spectrum thing. You can decide I actually do not want any inconsistent data to enter my system, but I still want to remain highly available, and maybe I will cache requests until I can make that happen, in which case you can use both systems. You end up saying: I am in this potentially partitioned world where I accumulate requests for change, and then I move into a world where I can consistently apply those requests.

[Time 0:04:30]

slide title: Information and Time

- + Old-school memory and records
- + The kind you remember
  - ... and keep
- + Auditing and more

[ Photograph of a stone tablet with ancient writing on it. ]

Another thing I think is tied to that place notion is the notion of information and time. Before we had computers, we used the word "memory" and we used the word "records", to mean things that were highly enduring, and that we never erased. We did not go back to old records and erase them and write new things. We just wrote new records. We just carved new things in stone.

And we kept them around. And that was a really good thing. And when we started to have computers we did not have much memory, and storage was really expensive, and we stopped doing that. Of course we had erasable media, and it seemed like: Wow! We can just do this different technique. But it is a technique we never used in the real world prior to computers, and which we should abandon now that we have plenty of memory, and plenty of storage.

So you want to move to a model that is information accretion. And there are lots of reasons to do this. Certainly just being able to audit things. What happened, and why? If you look at a database

that is update in place, that is in a weird state, how did it get there? You have no idea. It is just a side effect of the activity stream that happened. But you do not actually know why it is the way it is, unless you have independently kept some sort of log of everything that happened.

And so I think we can start taking an approach to databases that say: we will always keep track of everything that happened. Of course analytics people are desperate to have everything that happened. They do not like you erasing things any more.

[Time 0:06:00]

slide title: Perception and Reaction

- + No polling
- + Consistent

[ Simple figure with a sun and a human eye looking at things. It is intended to remind you of human visual perception. The details of the figure are not important for the talk. ]

And the final premise point here is that I think we want to be careful when we design systems, that we give proper consideration for perception as its own thing. Too often we just have this notion of: interaction is update and read, and update and read. And those things, they are tied together. If you use a traditional relational database and you want to read something consistent, you actually have to read inside a transaction.

That kind of coordination is unnatural. Perception is not a coordinated activity. Everybody is free in this room to look at whatever they want, or look at whomever they want. You do not need to get permission, or coordinate, or anything else. Light just bounces around, and we can all receive it at will.

In building these systems where we are focused on place, we can no longer see consistent things without coordinating about access to place. That is something we have to abandon, both for consistency and for scale. It ends up being a scaling disaster.

[Time 0:07:00]

slide title: Coming to Terms

Value	State
+ An _immutable_ magnitude, quantity, number ... or immutable composite thereof	+ Value of an identity at a moment in time
	Time
Identity	+ Relative before/after ordering of causal values
+ A putative entity we associate with a series of causally related values (states) over time	

So I am just going to briefly go through some of these terms that I am going to be using. When I say “value”, I mean something that is immutable, and it is a notion that you have to apply both to

things like 42, and bigger things like strings, and bigger things still like collections. And the premise of Datomic is: you can take that notion *all* the way, and you can consider the entire database, and the entirety of activity that has gone into that database, as a value. You can maintain and not have to consider corrupting in your hands.

We want to separate the notion of identity from where we put values. So I will talk a little bit more about identities, but the idea behind an identity is: we have notions that we carry through time, like sports teams, or rivers, and things like that.

But the actual values those identities take on change over time. But the things themselves do not change. The river does not turn into another river. You do not take the people who are on the team and push them around until they become the next people on the team.

There is just another value of the team. It is independent of the old one. So the notion of the team as an identity, we are going to associate with values over time. We are going to call those values over time “states”.

So an identity has a value at a particular point in time. That is its state. It may take on different states at different points in time.

And time is just a relative thing that may reflect some causality.

[Time 0:08:30]

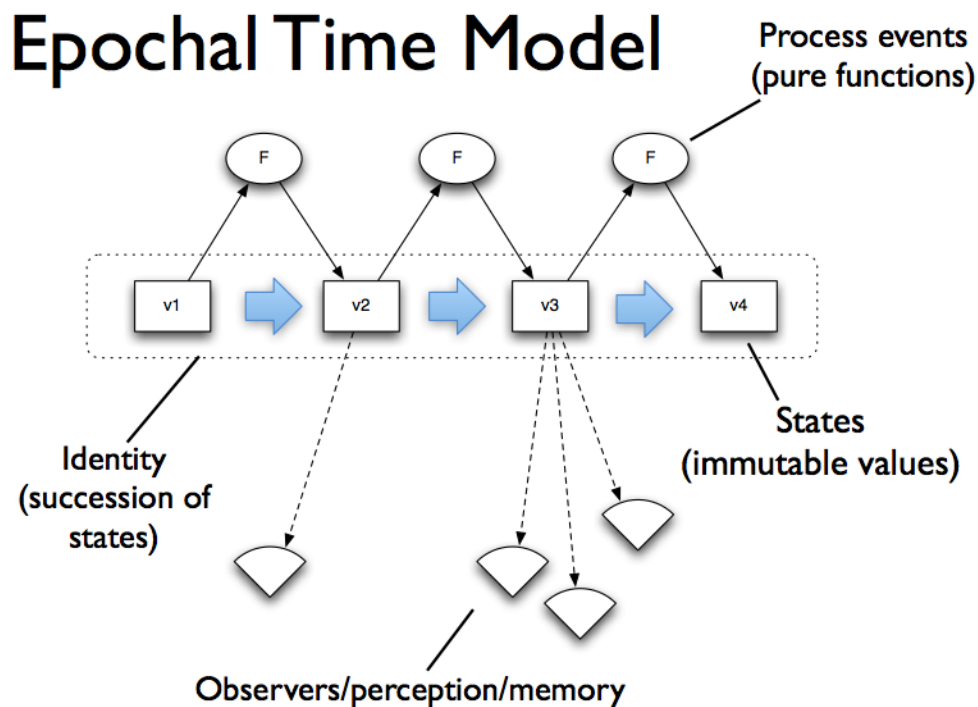


Figure 1: 0:08:30 Epochal Time Model

So that gives us a time model that looks like this. You may have seen this in another talk I have given about functional programming versus object orientation. This is the same problem, precisely the same problem, in the storage space.

So this is what I was talking about, graphically represented. The identity is the dotted box. It represents a succession of states. Each state is a value. We are going to move from state to state via transformation functions, some sort of process events.

And we want to be able to observe states. And once we have observed a state, we want to feel like we have a value in our hand. And the fact that time is proceeding should not affect our memory of what we saw.

And it does not in the real world, right? When things change in the world, they do not go into your brain and also simultaneously update your memories. You have memories of things that, they are always the past. In fact, we always perceive the past. That is how things work.

[Time 0:09:30]

slide title: Implementing Values

- + Persistent data structures
- + Trees
- + Structural sharing

So how do we implement values? In memory, we use persistent data structures. They are always trees, and they use structural sharing. And they look like this. I am not going to spend too much time on this. But the idea being, you can represent anything.

[Time 0:09:45]

## Structural Sharing

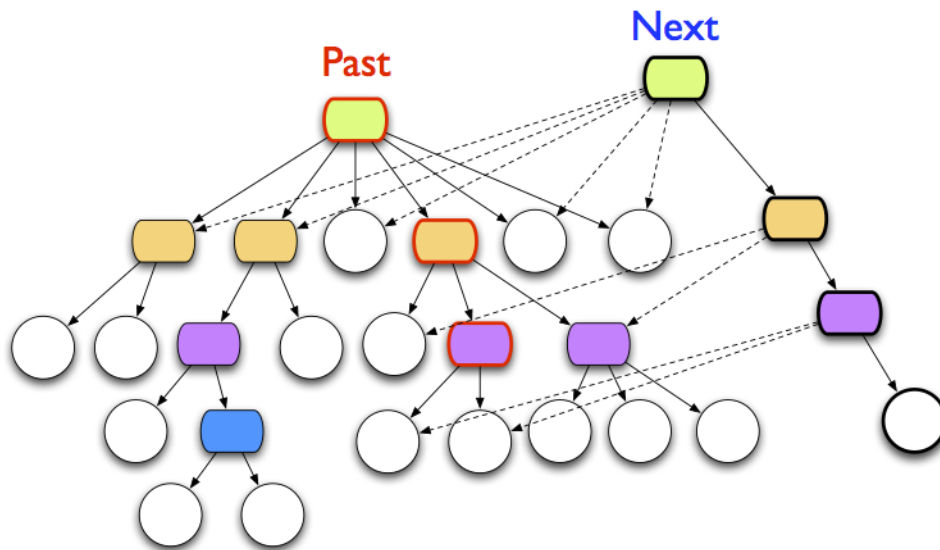


Figure 2: 0:09:45 Structural Sharing

You can represent sets and maps and vectors, all as trees. And once you have represented something as a tree, then you can leave that tree as an immutable thing, and when you want to “change” the value, and in particular here we are talking about aggregate values. So like an entire collection, and we want to add something to it.

You *do not* copy the entire thing. You instead make a new tree, which will at least involve a new root, and a path to the part of the tree that you had to make anew. And that new tree can share with

the old tree a whole bunch of stuff. And in this way, incremental change is inexpensive, but every particular value of the collection is immutable itself.

And you know this from linked lists. You can build linked lists where it says B, C, D, and you can link A to the rest of that, and that does not impact the rest of the list at all. Now I have a list that is B, C, D, and you have a list that is A, B, C, D, and we share the tail. There is no problem with that, as long as no one is ever going to change that in place.

And that is how persistent data structures work.

[Time 0:10:50]

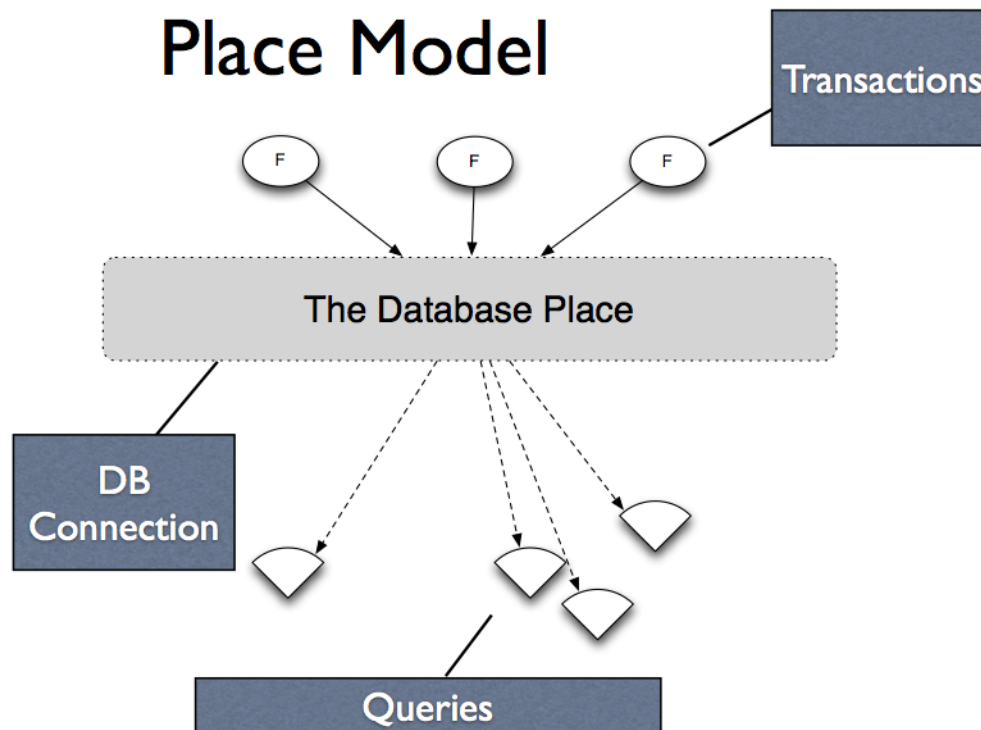


Figure 3: 0:10:50 Place Model

So the problem we have – and this is *not* just about SQL databases; this is a general problem with databases that work this way – is that too often the database is a place. It is this thing. It may be a lot of places. It may be a set of places. In a key value store it may be a set of places. It is still fundamentally a place where we get some sort of connection to the place. We can send requests to the place in order to update it, update parts of it. And that could be transactional, or not.

And then we issue queries. And each time we issue a query we get this random result out of the contents of the place. And the same query later will give us something different. We never have anything more concrete than that, that we can hang on to. It is just this black box. It gives novelty, potentially, every time we interact with it.

And there are a lot of problems with this.

[Time 0:11:45]

You will recognize: this is the same problem as objects. They have the same problem. They have conflated identity and value. They are both the same thing. This place is both an identity, *and* where

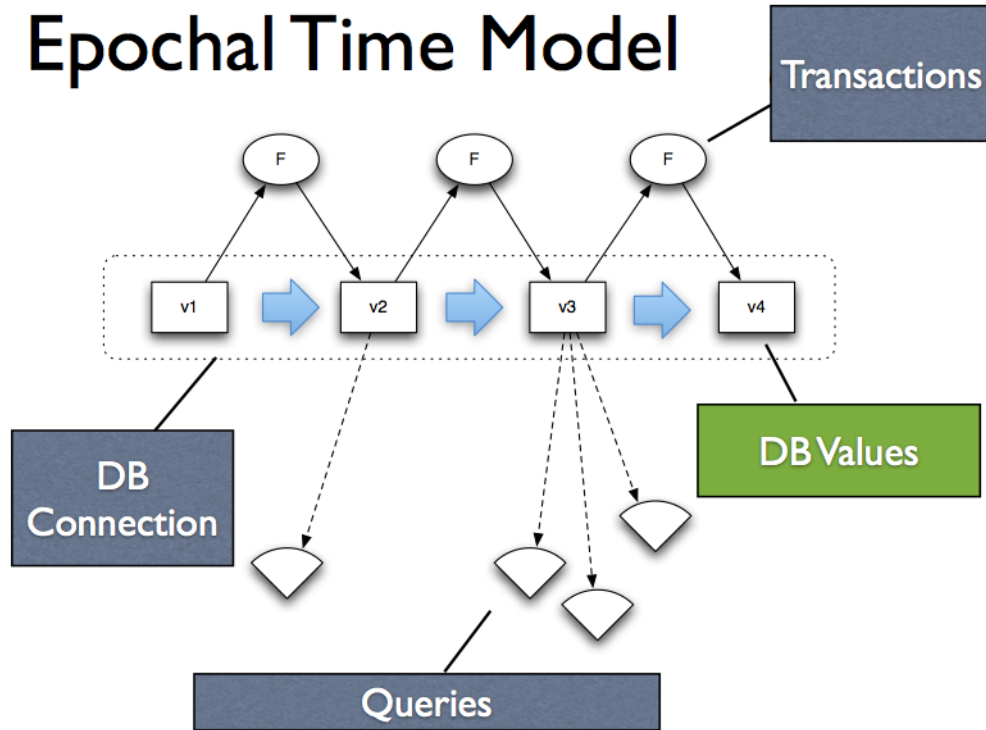


Figure 4: 0:11:45 Epochal Time Model

we keep the values, which means there is no way to get the value independent of the place, the identity, which should take on new states.

But unless I have some copy semantic, I cannot really do that, and copy semantics, again, introduce that coordination problem, and everything else. And heaven forbid you try to copy an entire database like that.

So what we want to do is: we want to adopt this same model, the same model that corrects the problems of object orientation, for databases. And we just want to replace that database place, with database values. So fundamentally we do not want to interact with the connection. Obviously you have to go through the connection to get a value, but once you have gotten a value, you should be able to interact with the value, not keep going back to the connection.

And in that way you can do stable operations. You can communicate things to other processes that are stable. You get all of the benefits you get from values, for databases. That is what we are shooting for.

[Time 0:12:50]

So this is a traditional database. I do not know if you can read that text or not. But you know what is in it. There is this server. It is this monolithic thing. It does transaction management. It does indexing. It does I/O. It manages storage. And it handles query requests.

And you are separate from it. And you send it strings or something, and you get back strings or something. And you are very terrified of overloading this thing. So you stick caching over it. And the caching is all on you. What do you put in the cache? It is up to you. You put the answers to questions, hoping that maybe you will ask the same question later. And expiring that, and determining the policies for it, is all your problem.



# Traditional Database

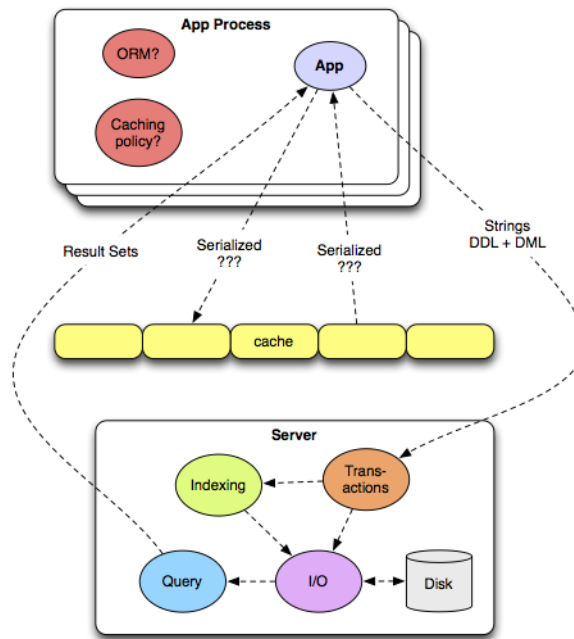


Figure 5: 0:12:50 Traditional Database

And the problem with this is that if we want to scale this, we have to make that relatively complex thing bigger. And we know there are limits to how big you can make one thing. And then it is going to burst. Or we are going to have to make copies of that thing. And this is already a really complicated thing. So we do not actually want a *lot* of really complicated things. It does not get simpler when we do that.

So this has gotten, correctly, dinged as something that is difficult, but not impossible, to scale. But certainly even if you can successfully scale it, it does not become simpler. It is very complex.

[Time 0:14:15]

slide title: The Choices

- + Coordination
  - + how much, and where?
  - + process requires it
  - + perception shouldn't
- + Immutability
  - + sine qua non

[ “sine qua non” is a Latin phrase meaning “an essential condition; a thing that is absolutely necessary” ]

So if we are going to fix this, we need to make a couple of choices.

The first choice is to be careful about when coordination is actually required. How much coordination do we need? Where do we do it? And for what purpose?

Process, which is a term I will use to say “the acquisition of novelty”, of novel information, is something that requires coordination. In the end, I do not care if it is transactional or eventual consistency. That thing at the end that is going to merge together your stuff, that is a form of coordination. There have to be rules to govern what is allowed, and what is not. Somebody has to be responsible for doing it. We cannot all do it. One person has to eventually say, “I am taking these two things, and turning it into this merged result.”

So there is coordination associated with process. But perception as I said before, is something that we want to avoid coordination for. And we want to remove that.

I am going to say that immutability is a fundamental premise of solving this problem. If you do not use it, you cannot solve it. Period. There is just no good way to do it. And you will see the benefits as we go through.

[Time 0:15:20]

slide title: Approach

- + Move to information model
- + Split process and perception
- + Immutable basis in storage
- + Novelty in memory

So the approach that is taken by Datomic, which is trying to solve a bunch of problems. You may not want to solve all of those problems, and you may have a subset of them, in which case some of the things Datomic does may apply to your architectures independent of the others. But because we are trying to do all of these things, very specific things will appear in our design.

So we want to move to an information model. We want to move away from a place oriented model to information. And I am going to talk about that in the next slide.

We want to split apart process: change acquisition; from perception: queries, reading, things like that. Transactions, perception, queries. They should not be colocated. They should not be intermingled. They need to be taken apart.

We want to use storage in a way that is fundamentally immutable. There are a bunch of architectural advantages to that. There are a bunch of informational advantages to that.

And we are going to also supplement storage with memory so that we can do this efficiently, and that is sort of an implementation technique that I will talk about.

[Time 0:16:20]

slide title: Information

- + Inform
  - + 'to convey knowledge via \_facts\_'
  - + 'give shape to (the mind)'
- + Information
  - + the facts

So what do I mean by information? The word “inform” means “to convey knowledge via facts”. And information is just “the facts”. So we want to build a system that stores facts. And facts, it means something very specific. A fact is something that happened in the world. There are other things you

might use storages for, other than information. Sometimes you need a place to keep stuff. Datomic is not about keeping stuff.

It is perfectly fine to need to keep stuff, and have systems that just keep stuff.

[Time 0:17:00]

slide title: Facts

- + `_Fact_` - 'an event or thing known to have happened or existed'
- + From: `factum` - 'something done'
- + Must include time
- + Remove structure (a la RDF)
- + Atomic `_Datom_`
  - + Entity/Attribute/Value/Transaction (time)

[ RDF is "Resource Description Framework" - <https://www.w3.org/RDF> ]

But if we are trying to build an information system, we need to really actually be aware of what that stuff is.

So we are going to say this stuff is facts, which means "something that happened". It is a fundamental part of the word. The word is derived from a past participle that means "something that already happened".

And one of the key things that falls out of that is: facts *cannot* be changed. They are recordings of what happened in the past. You do not change facts. You do not update facts, or anything like that. What do you do? You accumulate new facts.

A fact must have occurred at a point in time, so you have to have some path to time. And it is important if you are going to build a system that is about the accretion of facts, that you have a representation that your structural representation is minimized. You do not want to have this big composite thing and say, "I need to add a fact to it, like in the middle here." And store this whole thing to get that new piece of novelty in. You need to actually boil down your data representation to be that primitive thing.

And we call that a `Datom`. But it is just an entity, an attribute, a value, and some path to time. We use the transaction, because it is also a path to other information about what happened, including provenance, or causality, or operations, or anything else like that.

[Time 0:18:25]

slide title: Database State

- + The database is an expanding `_value_`
  - + An accretion of `_facts_`
  - + The past doesn't change - immutable
- + Process requires new space
- + Fundamental move away from `_places_`

[ Background image of this slide is growth rings of a tree trunk. ]

So the fundamental difference here from a place-oriented database is that we are going to consider a database to be a value, but we know things change over time. So how do you have something that is both a value, immutable, *and* have novelty over time?

And the analogy I make here is to tree rings, but they do not show up that well on the slides. But a tree grows, and there are new rings, and they get added to the outside. But if you had a view of the tree, of the middle of the tree, the fact that the new rings are being added, it does not impact you. In other words, any particular value of the database is unimpacted by the novelty that comes later. That view is still stable.

I can say that is a value, and it meets all of the criteria of value. It is immutable. It does not change. I can convey it potentially to somebody else. And we will see how that works a little bit later.

So a database is about accretion of facts. And in that way we get something that both “changes”, it grows bigger, and still feels immutable to the consumers. Because anyone who is looking at a particular inner set, or a past point in time before that, has something that is perpetually stable to look at.

That means that process, novelty, new information, requires new space. This is a physics problem. There is just no way to get new stuff, and keep old stuff, and not have new storage for it.

On the other hand, we are doing this already. How many people keep your source code in the file system, in a directory? And you just change code, and you just store it over the old code? I always get one person that raises their hand. That is crazy.

[Time 0:20:01]

slide title: Accretion

- + Root per transaction doesn't work
- + Latest values include past as well
  - + The past is sub-range
- + Important for information model

No, we do not do that, right? We don't do that. But there was a time where we were like, “Oh, my god! Keep every version of every source file we have? There is no way we can do that. We are going to fill our floppy.”

[Audience laughter]

It is not like that any more. Systems, in the time I have been using computers, are a million times more capacious than they were. That is not an exaggeration. That is the actual number. A million times more capacious. We do not need to be worrying about space.

And of course we are already doing this. Everybody is keeping everything. Everybody is logging everything. We are keeping it around. And in terms of the kinds of information you would keep in a database like this, it is certainly no burden to acquire new space. And we move away from places by doing this.

Now I showed you a picture before about how we do persistent data structures in memory. We have this tree. And we say I want a new version of the tree. And I create a new root, and I sew together a new path to the new data, and I point at all the old data. And because I did that in my program, I had this implicit handoff. I had the old version of the tree, and I made a new version of the tree. And I had that in my hand. And garbage collection got rid of the other one, if no one was looking at it.

You cannot actually do that on the disk. Because that would leave us with a new root for every change to the database. And instead of having this ever growing tree, we would have a whole bunch of independent snapshots. And no snapshot would necessarily contain the past.

So instead, what we want to do is say: every value incorporates the past as well. It is not a whole bunch of snapshots. And this ends up being really important for the information model as well, because you really want to issue queries across time.

It is a terrible shame when we use databases that force you to overwrite the email address. Because when you have a problem, it is like, “You never notified me about my shipment.” I don’t know, what is your email address? Oh, that is the email address I have. If I could look at the database at the point in time that I notified you, I could look and say, “Ooh. We used to have this other email address, and that is where I sent it.” Or have this other physical address, and that is where I sent it.

When we update in place, we lose the ability to do that. We also lose the ability to answer questions that cross time. What is happening? We have a supplier, and they change their prices. And if we are using a place-oriented database, we just update the prices in place.

But then the business person comes to us and says, “This supplier really seems to be jerking us around.” Or maybe they say, “There seems to be this seasonality to their pricing. I wonder if we could game that and get better pricing by ordering at different points in time. What is the history of the pricing?” I don’t know. Every time they give us a new price, we update the price in place. I have no history of that. If you keep everything, you will be able to go and say, “Oh, look at this! Every June they raise their prices. Let us order in May.”

[Time 0:23:00]

slide title: Process

- + Reified
- + Primitive representation of novelty
  - + Assertions and retractions of `_facts_`
  - + `_Minimal_`
- + Other transformations expand into those

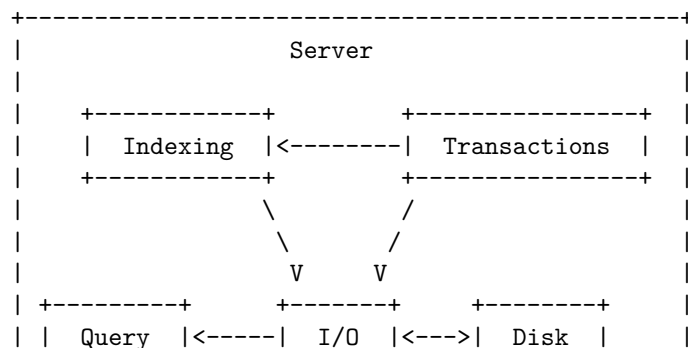
I am not going to talk too much about process, but the critical thing about a design like this is that when you have novelty, you do not want to have effects. You do not want to say, “Something changed in the world. Let me just affect things.” You want to take that change and turn it into something concrete that you store. Anybody who is used to event sourcing, it is a representation of that idea.

But the general notion is that you have to reify process. You have to turn it into a thing that you can look at and touch. Whether that is a log, or whether that is inside the data itself, which is what happens in Datomic, you do want to keep track of that.

And you want it to be minimal. If you are going to keep track of everything, you cannot say every time you change a single thing, you have to store a new row, or a new document. That does not work.

[Time 0:23:45]

slide title: Deconstruction





anything? has nothing to do with this. This is about indexing. You accumulate novelty in memory. You could also have logged it. Then periodically you put that into storage, and a process integrates the novelty, in a batch way, into the index.

In the case of BigTable that is a merge join that is done in the file system, and in the case of Datomic, that is a merge of these trees, also done in storage. So it works the same way. You accumulate novelty in memory. Occasionally you put it in storage, and you use persistent tree merge to do it.

[Time 0:26:40]

slide title: Indexing

- + Maintaining sort live in storage - bad
- + BigTable et al:
  - + Accumulate novelty in memory
  - + Current view: mem + storage merge
  - + Occasional integrate mem into storage
- Releases memory

So indexing is just this merging. It just says: I have accumulated a certain amount of novelty in memory. I can now amortize the cost of integrating that in the tree. So instead of making a new root for every new piece of information, I now say I have accumulated a whole bunch of information. I will create a new root and amortize the cost of making the inner leaves to accumulate the stuff.

So it is the same thing. It is just like BigTable. We merge them together.

[Time 0:27:10]

## Transactions and Indexing

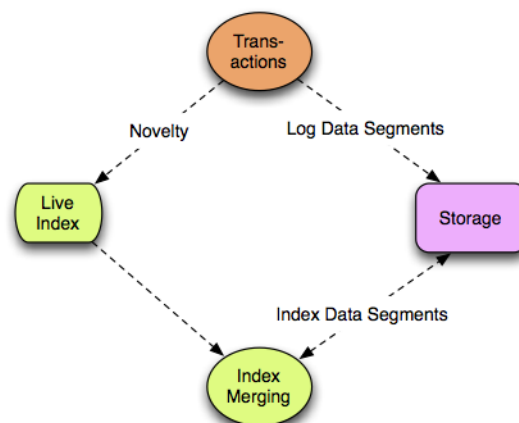


Figure 6: 0:27:10 Transactions and Indexing

So this is what transaction processing and indexing looks like. Transactions take novelty as it comes in. It immediately logs that. Again, that is the durability side. It is not really the organizational side.

And keeps novelty in memory where it is organized on the fly, and sorted in memory so it can answer questions from memory.

Periodically this merge job will take that live index from memory and integrate it into a new tree in storage. That tree is sharing structure, just like the other picture.

[Time 0:27:45]

# Perception

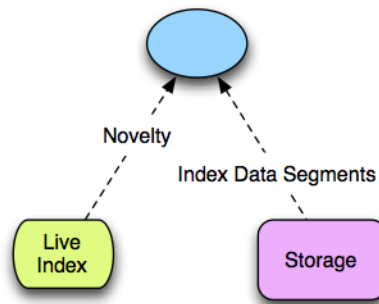


Figure 7: 0:27:45 Perception

And then we can look at the perception side. Now the perception side means: I want to ask a question and get an answer. I want to ask query-like questions, and I want to get answers at the speed that indexes can help me get.

Well in order to do that, I need access to storage, because the last stable index in storage is sitting there. Plus I need access to the delta, what has happened since then, from memory. And it is the same thing BigTable does. If you ask BigTable a question, it does a live merge join between the file system and what is in memory. And Datomic works the same way. It is a live merge join between the live index and storage.

The only difference is it is a tree instead of flat files.

The key thing here is: what coordination is required to do this? None! The exact right amount. Zero. There is no talking to the server. There is no need for a transaction. The stuff in storage is immutable. The stuff in memory is immutable. It uses the same technique, a tree here and a tree there. The join is stable. There is no coordination required at all. As long as you have read access to storage and access to the live index, you are good.

[Time 0:29:03]

slide title: Components

- + Transactor
- + Peers
  - + Your app servers, analytics machines etc
- + Redundant storage service



So the components of the system, roughly, are: there is a transactor, which coordinates a request for change.

There are peers, and these are actually your application servers, because now you are no longer tied to this big database server. We are going to empower application servers with query capabilities and direct access to storage.

And some sort of storage service.

[Time 0:29:25]

## Datomic Architecture

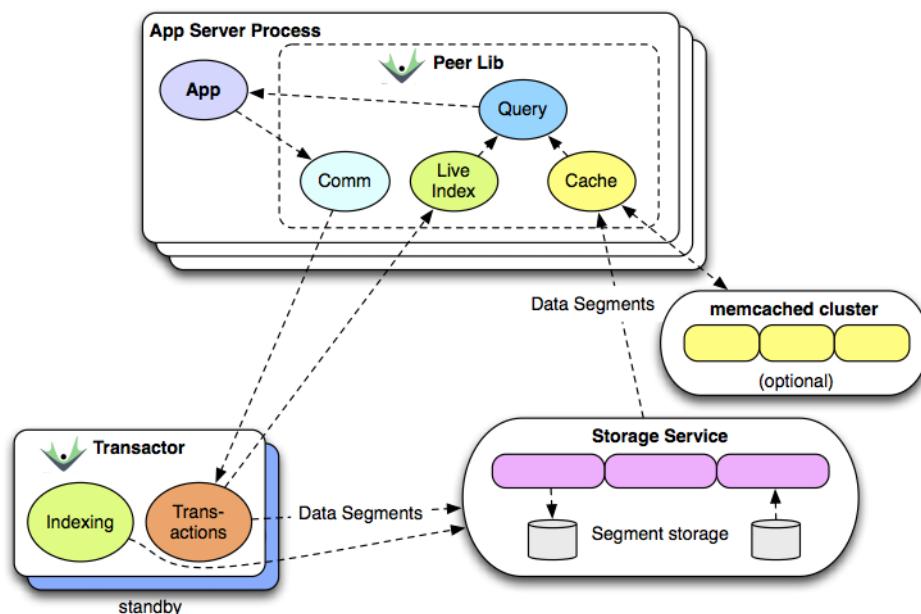


Figure 8: 0:29:25 Datomic Architecture

So that whole thing looks like this. If we start in the bottom right, we see a storage service. It is a quite interesting aspect of Datomic that it is not in the business of disks at all. There are lots of good storage services that already exist.

If you take a systems approach to the problem of: how do you make a new kind of database, you say, "I should be reusing those." I should not be reimplementing DynamoDB, and I should not tie the way I use storage to the details of how I do transactions or queries. I should use that a la carte.

And so that is what happens. Datomic can run in memory. It can run against a SQL database. It can run against DynamoDB. It can run against Infinispan and similar memory type grids. It can run on top of Riak, as we will talk about later.

And in each case, we can make decisions about storage that are orthogonal to the other decisions we make. That is exactly the point that was made in the keynote this morning. A systems approach will give you choices about how you integrate the systems, and when you use the different parts.

If we move to the left, we see the transactor. It does transaction coordination. So anybody who has some novelty they want to have enter the system will supply it to the transactor. The transactor has no storage at all. It is strictly a coordination thing. It will take the novelty, integrate it into the live

view, and put it into storage. When it puts it into storage directly, that is a logging, append-y kind of process. It is the indexing that is going to build the sorted view that gives us the leverage.

In the case right now, the transactor also does that periodic indexing, but that could be moved to a different machine.

Finally, if we look at the top we end up with the application server process, which now is empowered with both read access to storage, and its own query engine. So we have relocated query from a monolithic place where we go to answer questions, to everybody gets their own brain.

And once you go to everybody gets their own brain, you now have a system that is scalable. If you have bigger load and you have to answer more questions, you can just add more servers here, which you are already adding, because you are adding these servers as the load increases anyway. And that is elastic. As you do not care any more, you just have them go away.

The other thing that is interesting about this is the way caching works. We saw a picture of cache in the traditional database model before. And what did we put in cache? We put the *answers* to questions in cache, hoping maybe we will ask the same question again later. And we are doing it because we are trying to keep the burden off of this single monolithic server, or cluster of servers.

Now what gets cached, and this happens automatically, under the hood, if you just configure “please use memcache”, is that the *sources* of answers get cached. In other words, the actual pages of indexes from the storage get put into memcache, which means that all of the queries have access to the resources they need to answer questions from memory directly.

What actually gets put in storage is not the individual facts. When we looked at those trees before, what actually is getting put into storage are chunks of index, segments, just like the blocks that a traditional database puts in a file system, in a B-tree in the file system. Datomic puts chunks of index into storage, and all it needs from storage is key-value style access. And we will talk about the consistency model in a second.

[Time 0:33:10]

slide title: Transactor

- + Accepts transactions
  - + Expands, applies, logs, broadcasts
- + Periodic indexing, in background
- + Indexing creates garbage
  - + Storage GC

So I talked about the transactor. It does accepting transactions. The other thing it does is it also rebroadcasts to peers the novelty, so that they can maintain their own live index in memory. And therefore when they do their queries, they do their own merge joining.

So the transactor does that. It does background indexing. Indexing creates garbage. So we end up with the notion of garbage in storage, just like we do in memory. We just acquire new memory with “new”, right? That is a great thing, but it creates garbage. And it should not be surprising when you move to an immutable process where new information requires new storage that you end up with an analogous thing on disk. You end up with garbage on disk, and garbage collection for disk.

[Time 0:34:00]

slide title: Peer Servers

- + Peers directly access storage service

- + Have own query engine
- + Have live mem index and merging
- + Two-tier cache
  - + Datoms w/ object values (on heap)
  - + Segments (memcached)

That is fine.

I talked about this pretty much already. Peers have direct access to storage. And these storage systems, you can imagine something like DynamoDB or Riak, these are highly scalable, redundant, distributed, highly available systems. They are quite capable of serving an equally scalable set of readers at very high speed. So they have direct access.

They have the query engine. They do the merging. And there is extensive caching. What is great about the fact that everything we are putting in storage is immutable is: we can cache it relentlessly. You can cache it anywhere you want. It is never going to change.

So you can see from this that we have now teased apart some of the CAP stuff. We end up with one consistency and availability model for writing, and a different one for reads and queries.

How many people saw Mike Nygard's talk this morning?

[ QCon 2012 page: Michael T. Nygard, "Exploiting Loopholes in CAP" <https://qconsf.com/sf2012/sf2012/presentation/ExploitingLoopholesInCAP>]

Video: <https://www.infoq.com/presentations/cap-loopholes>

Slides: [https://qconsf.com/sf2012/dl/qcon-sanfran-2012/slides/MichaelT.Nygard\\_ExploitingLoopholesInCAP.pdf](https://qconsf.com/sf2012/dl/qcon-sanfran-2012/slides/MichaelT.Nygard_ExploitingLoopholesInCAP.pdf)

]

[Time 0:35:00]

slide title: Consistency and Scale

- + Process/writes go through transactor
  - + traditional server scaling/availability
- + Immutability supports consistent reads
  - + without transactions
- + Query scales with peers
  - + Elastic/dynamic e.g. auto-scaling

It was a great talk. So Datomic actually has loop-holed 2, 8, and 10, all put together.

So we have a traditional availability model for writes. A transactor can have a backup. It is high availability only by standby, and if you get partitioned you lose availability. But this system is oriented towards consistency, so that is where the tradeoff was made. There is nothing wrong with making a different tradeoff. The trick is: understanding tradeoffs need to be made, and making tradeoffs when you need to make them. And getting the solution that you need for your business.

But on the read side it is completely different, because of two things. One is, everything we put into storage is immutable, which means that we actually end up getting consistent reads. Because it was written consistently, we never have an issue about seeing half of something. We are always going to see the entirety of something, or we will not see it at all. I will talk about that a little bit more in a minute.

And then query scales with peers, and it scales in an elastic way, not in a preconfigured, "I am going to have 17 peers", and I set that in my configuration file. But in a real, I just set up AWS auto scaling and I get more or fewer as load goes up and down.

[Time 0:36:30]

slide title: Memory Index

- + Persistent sorted set
- + Large internal nodes
- + Pluggable comparators
- + 2 sorts always maintained
  - + EAVT, AEVT
- + plus AVET, VAET

So I am going to talk a little bit about the memory index. It is this persistent sorted set. It has big internal nodes, just like the one on disk. Not quite as big as the one on disk.

And there are a couple of sorts. We sort by entity, and we sort by attribute. That means you get the effect of something more like a document store when you via the entity orientation, and you get something much more like a column store when you go by the attribute orientation that keeps all the values of email next to each other. So you do not have to pull whole records, and there is no notion of record.

There are these Datoms, and you can sort them different ways.

[Time 0:37:00]

slide title: Storage

- + Log of tx asserts/retracts (in tree)
- + Various covering indexes (trees)
- + Storage service/server requirements
  - + Data segment values (K->V)
  - + atoms (consistent read)
  - + pods (conditional put)

Storage itself is the same kind of thing. It is this tree. We store the log as a tree. We store the indexes as a tree. And they are fully covering indexes. So I use the word index, but it is not actually a pointer to something else. It is a covering index, all of the data is in each index. It is just sorted different ways.

And from the storage service we have very basic requirements. We have to be able to put things and, and get them back as keys. And that is why I call it storage. At this point, that storage is not looking like a database. It is looking like storage. And there is nothing wrong with that. It is very important that this component is there, and has the qualities that it has.

So we put values in under keys. And the keys are just like UUIDs that label the immutable blocks of index that go in there. And there are a couple of cases where we need consistency, in order to support the consistency model above. There is no magic trick that I can get consistency out of inconsistency.

And I will talk about that more in a context.

[Time 0:38:05]

So I just want to show you this picture again. This is happening on disk, but not immediately each change. This notion of trees will move from one to another.

[Time 0:38:15]

So in memory, this is what it looks like. We have some immutable thing. It is inside a box. That box is called an atom in Clojure, but it does not really matter. We can consider it a pointer. Things that

# Structural Sharing

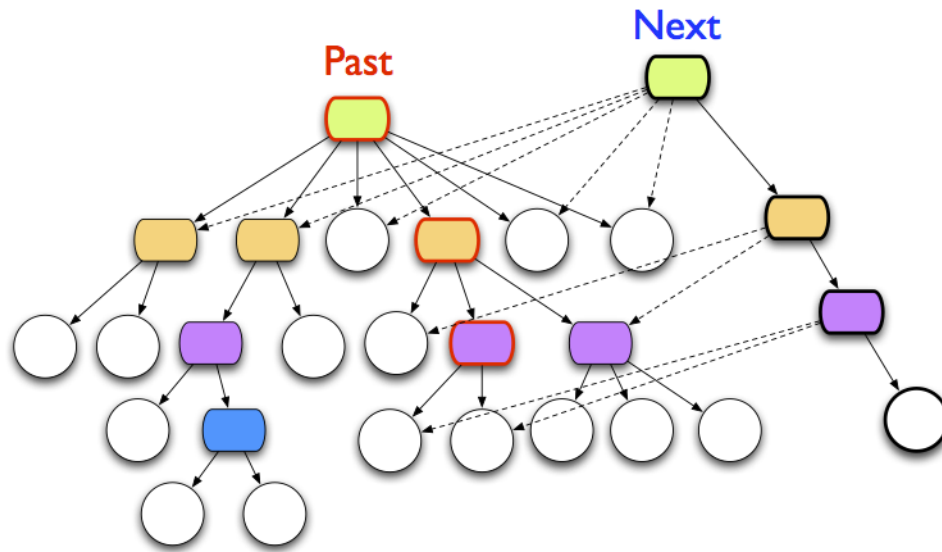


Figure 9: 0:38:05 Structural Sharing

# What's in a DB Value?

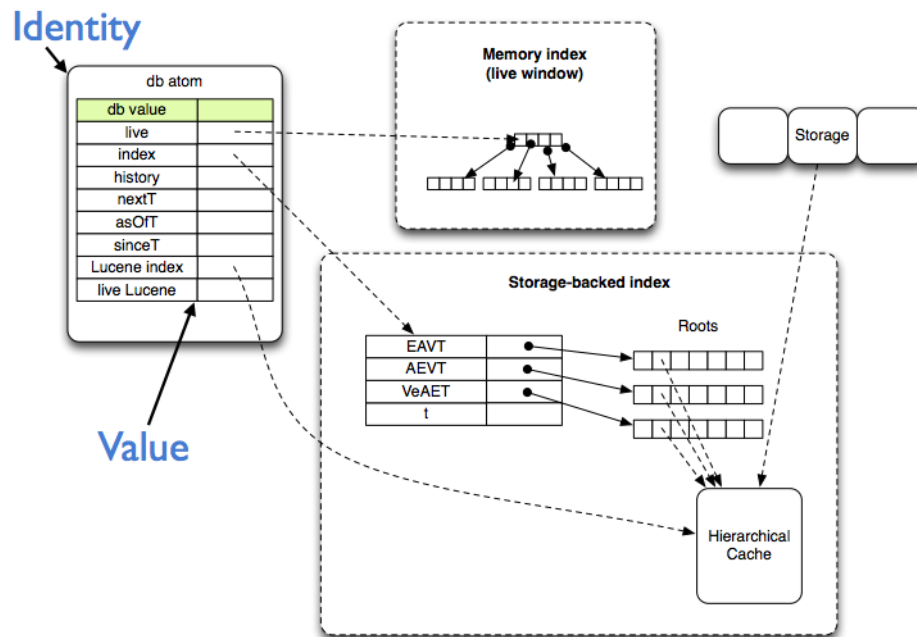


Figure 10: 0:38:15 What's in a DB Value?

are immutable are always pointers, and the things they point to are always immutable. That is the recipe for that Epochal Time Model I showed you before.

And actually it was said in the keynote this morning. He talked about the way you use immutability and pointer swap. That is how Datomic works. Exactly that.

So in memory we have this pointer to something that is immutable, which itself points to the memory index, which is another one of these trees that is immutable and it does the same thing. And then it points to a tree in storage.

And I will show you that here.

[Time 0:39:05]

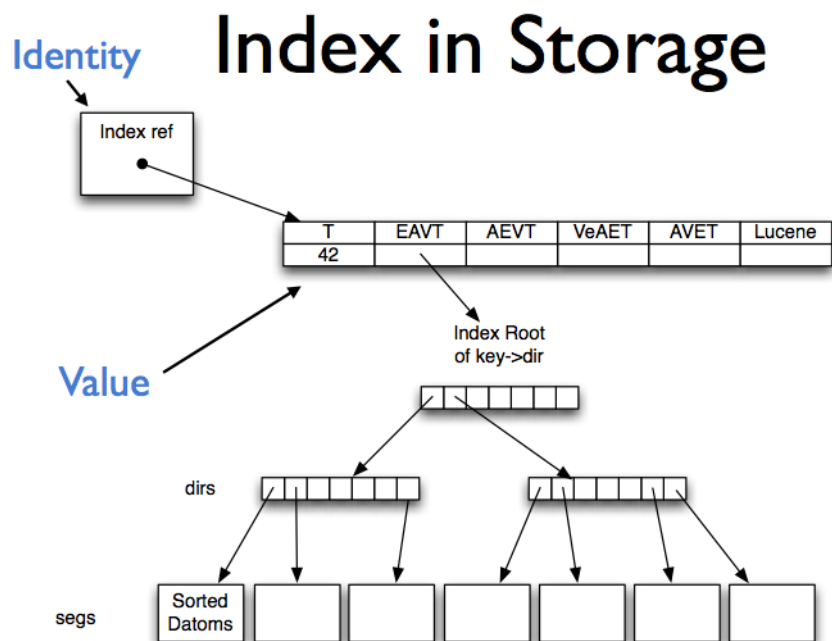


Figure 11: 0:39:05 Index in Storage

So in storage it looks like this. There is a cell in storage, an entry, which is the identity. How do you find a database in storage if it is always immutable, and there are always new values, how do you go from, “I would like to open the customer database”, to “one of those trees”? Well there has to be at least one mutable thing, which is “the customer database is there”. A pointer.

There is one of those. In fact, there are probably four of them per database. That is it. That is all of the mutability you need to make a database. That point to an entire tree, which is itself a pointer to a set of trees, one for each sort. We can also store Lucene data the same way.

And then that is a bunch of blocks, just like B-tree blocks that form this tree with a wide branching factor. And those all get stored as blobs in the storage. So all of the segments of this tree are stored as blobs in storage.

[Time 0:40:05]

slide title: Datomic on Riak + ZooKeeper

- + Riak
  - redundant, distributed, highly available
  - durable
  - eventually consistent
- + ZooKeeper
  - redundant, durable,
  - consistent (ordered ops + CAS)

So I wanted to talk about one particular implementation of storage under Datomic that is interesting because we desperately wanted to support Riak. It is very popular. It is a very high quality product. We have a lot of customers who are interested in using it. But Riak is only eventually consistent at the moment. So it is not actually a store that can satisfy all of the requirements of Datomic.

So in order to make Datomic run on Riak, we had to build another storage service out of two other services. I think this is the best thing ever, because I do not want to write any of this stuff. But I love the fact that things like Riak, and in this case we chose ZooKeeper, exist, do one thing, do one thing really well, have really great semantics, and are things you can use as building blocks.

This whole notion of, “I am using Riak, and therefore my world is Riak.” You do not need to do that. Riak is a tool. You can use it for its own benefits, and use it as a piece of a bigger composite thing. And that is what this does.

So Riak has these properties. It is redundant. It is highly available. It is elastic. It is distributed. It is durable. But it is eventually consistent. We need to supplement that, because we need these pointers. We need to store these pointers somewhere. And they need to be written in a consistent, and actually with CAS, way.

And so ZooKeeper does that. ZooKeeper is both redundant and durable, and consistent. It does not scale like Riak does. It is not actually for that kind of storage. It is for very small amounts of storage. But that is what we have.

We have this beautiful thing. We have all of this immutable data, and possibly tons of it with tons of readers. We have a tiny, tiny, tiny little bit of mutable data that has to be manipulated consistently, and it is very infrequently read. That is *exactly* what ZooKeeper is for. It does exactly that job.

So it looks like this.

[Time 0:42:00]

We keep the values in Riak. Everything we put in Riak is immutable. It is those big chunks of index.

And we put the identities in ZooKeeper. A couple of pointers per database, that point to where the roots are in Riak. And we use ZooKeeper’s CAS semantics to make sure that they are updated in a consistent way, and viewed in a consistent way.

[Time 0:42:25]

slide title: Riak Usage

- + Everything put into Riak is immutable
- + N=3, W=2, DW=2
- + R=1, not-found-ok = false
  - ’first found’ semantics
- + There or not
  - no vector clocks, siblings etc
- + No speculative lookup

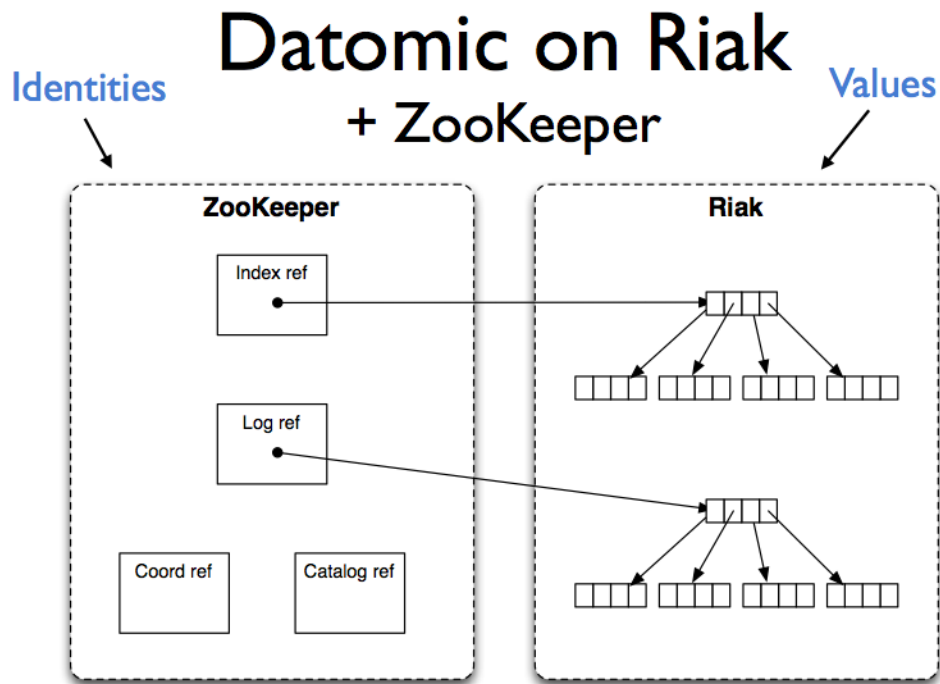


Figure 12: 0:42:00 Datomic on Riak + ZooKeeper

So everything we put into Riak is immutable. These are some details. How many people know about Riak or Dynamo? So this is just a little bit of information about that. If this makes no sense to you, it is fine.

But we can presume N replicas of 3. We write with a quorum write of 2.

But the really really interesting thing is the read side. We read R=1. Who starts worrying? R=1. You wrote N is 3 and W is 2, and R is 1. That is not what I read in the Dynamo paper, for consistency.

But *everything* changes – Mike Nygard mentioned this earlier – everything changes if *all* you ever write is something immutable, because then there are only two possible things. It is there, or it is not. There are no other possibilities. There is no: it was updated, there was this vector clock, there was this causality of how it got to be this way. There is none of that. It is there, or it is not.

If it is there or it is not, you can read with R=1, as long as you have one additional semantic, which is: if you do not find it, try another guy. Because as soon as you find any value of it, you have found *the* value of it, unambiguously. That is super efficient, and really really clean.

So we do R=1, and Riak has not-found-ok as a flag, and if you set that to false it means: if it is not found on the first read, it will try another. And only if it exhausts N will it come back and say: I am sorry, it is not there.

That is coupled with another thing, which is: do we ever look in Riak for something that might be there, or might not? Do we do any speculative lookup? No. Never. We found the root in ZooKeeper. The root is ABCDE, 12345. When we go to look for that in Riak, we expect it to be there. We are not randomly picking a number out of the ether and saying: do you have this? Do you know this? You are never doing that. You are always saying, “Somebody told me you had this. Give me it.”

When we get that value, we get this block of pointers to other values. Guess what? They should all be there.



So the combination of immutability and these semantics completely change the way you can use something like Riak, and drastically up the consistency that you get. Because if you have rough availability to the data and your reads are all satisfied, you know you are always getting something that is consistent from the application view, what Mike Nygard called the *predicative* notion of consistency. That this set of data matches the business requirements notion of what constitutes a consistent data set. You are never seeing half of one tree, and half of another tree.

You started from a root. You found all of the things that were under it. That is a consistent view of the world.

[Time 0:45:25]

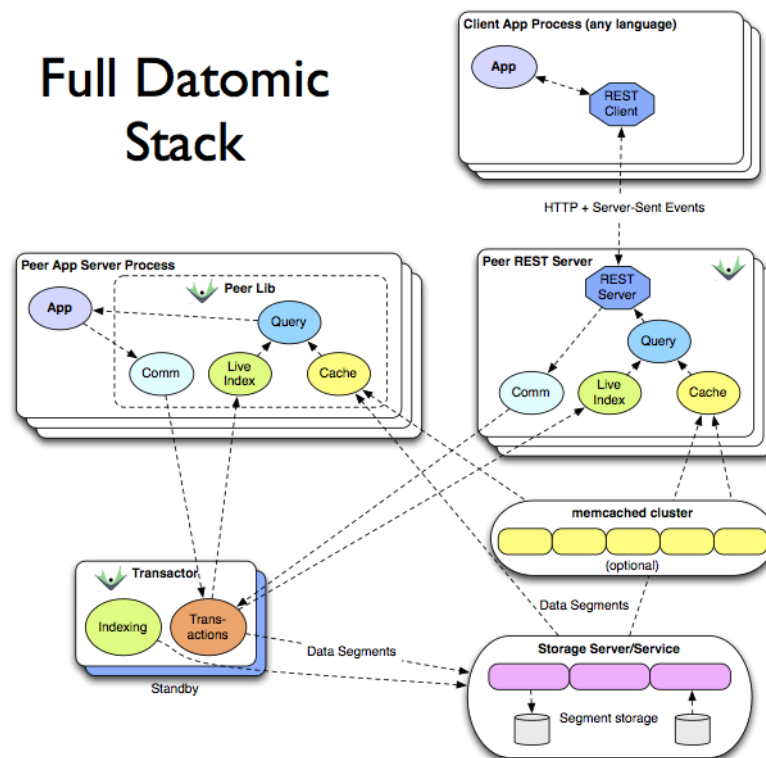


Figure 13: 0:45:25 Full Datomic Stack

The full stack for Datomic looks like this. I am not going to have a lot of time to talk about this, except to show you that there is also a RESTful interface, which is more client/server oriented.

[Time 0:45:36]

slide title: Stable Bases

```
// Peer
Database db = connection.db().asOf(1000);
Peer.q(aQuery, db);

// Client
GET /data/mem/test/1000/datoms?index=aevt
```

"1000" in both is the "basis"

- + Same query, same results
- + db permalinks!
  - + communicable, recoverable
- + Multiple conversations about same value

But this just shows you some of the cool things that you can get once you have the database as a value.

In the first case, we are using Java. In one of these first class peers, we say connection dot get the database. And we can say dot as of some point in time. We can ask for one of the inner rings. And then we get a value of the database that is that set of inner rings, that set of data from that point and prior. And we can issue queries to it over and over, always with the same basis. Every query we issue to that value of the database has the same basis.

And that even works when you go over a client/server protocol like the RESTful client. You actually can have permalinks for databases. I want to go back to this. I want to remember this database. I want to tell somebody: I think this database was messed up. And I can send them a link, and three weeks later they can go look at that link and say, “Oh yeah, that looks bad.” Let us fix our code and run it against the same database and see if it is better.

So it is communicable. You can recover it.

[Time 0:46:38]

slide title: DB Values

- + Time travel
  - + db.asOf - past
  - + db.since - windowed
  - + db.with(tx) - speculative
- + dbs are arguments to query, not implicit
  - + mock with datom-shaped data:
    - [[:fred :likes "pizza"]
    - [:sally :likes "Ice cream"]]

And there are all kinds of things you get from treating the database as a value. You can say as of a point of time in the past. You can window it.

You can take a value of the database and say, “I wonder what this database would look like *if* I made these transactions.” You can do that completely locally. You do not have to talk to the transactor or the server. You do not mess up anybody else. You say: I have the value of the database. I am thinking about putting this data in. I am going to actually say: Give me that database, with this data. Then I can issue some queries and say: do the queries still work? Or does this meet my requirements?

OK. Good. Now I will really put it in via the transactor, to the version of the database everyone can see.

The other thing that is key is that everything about database flips around. Database is an argument to query. It is not the ambient container for a query. Which means you can have queries that involve more than one data source, including things in memory.

[Time 0:47:30]

slide title: DB Simplicity Benefits

- + Epochal state
  - + Coordination only for process
- + Transactions well defined
  - + Functional accretion
- + Freedom to relocate/scale storage, query
- + Extensive caching
- + Process events

So I think there are a ton of simplicity benefits you get from this. I do not have time to really dig into them.

But transactions are well defined. We only have coordination for novelty, not for perceptions.

You can put your storage anywhere you want, and you have a lot of freedom about how that works and how it scales. You can cache anywhere.

And process is reified, which means both: you can look at it and see what happened, and you can transmit it around and therefore build reactive systems.

[Time 0:48:00]

slide title: The Database as a Value

- + Dramatically less complex
- + More powerful
- + More scalable
- + Better information model

So I think the net approach that you get out of this is that things are a lot less complex. You get a lot more power. You can see the scalability of query and reads. You can take advantage of this great technology like Dynamo databases and things like that. And I think you get an information model that is a lot more sound.

So hopefully this has given you some ideas for your own architectures. And thanks very much.

[Audience applause]

[Time 0:48:26]