

Nix party tricks

Building EC2s, images, and lambda packages with
NixOS

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Outline

Preamble

Demo Overview

Extremely abbreviated intro to nix

First party trick: nix for managing development environments

Second party trick: nix for managing ec2s

Third party trick: nix for managing lambda runtimes

Preamble

Nix is magic

Surprise, this is a magic show!

Nix is a special kind of magic for specifying pretty much any output you could want.

Nothing up my sleeve. . .

Behold, a fresh VM.

I am clicking through these things because I am very serious.

... but cards on the table

There's always something to install when you start.

For those playing along at home

This text is expository, written for flavor and background

This text highlights an important definition

Satoshi Nakamoto: last known alias of Charles Ponzi

This text is instructional

Green means go! Do as I say.

Demo Overview

Purpose

- survey of a bunch of common problems and demonstrate solutions with nix
- whirlwind tour of some great nix ecosystem tooling
- code is public:
<https://github.com/flurie/nix-party-tricks>

Let's install nix!

Installing nix

- Go to <https://nixos.org>
- select **Download**
- Follow multi-user installation instructions (unless you're on something weird like WSL)

And let's install some things to make our lives easier (and this demo shorter)

Rosetta 2

```
softwareupdate --install-rosetta
```

git

```
nix-env -iA nixpkgs.git
```

cachix

```
nix-env -iA nixpkgs.cachix
```

add some stuff to /etc/nix/nix.conf

```
experimental-features = nix-command flakes  
trusted-users = root $(whoami)
```

explicitly add cachix cache

```
cachix use flurie
```

Extremely abbreviated intro to
nix

Nix the First: Language

Main features:

- functional
- dynamic
- lazy
- base language is tiny
- Haskell influence (though much divergence since)

Nix the First: Language (con't)

Quirky type system:

- strings have native multiline support
- URIs
- paths (relative and absolute)
- no advanced objects, everything is a set (map)
- first-class functions

Nix the Second: Package Manager

nixpkgs

- Fundamental unit: the derivation
- Built with and extends Nix language
- Largest, most active package repository of its kind
- Many smaller ecosystems, especially by language (2nix)

Nix the Second: Package Manager (con't)



Figure 1: The Dirty Secret

Nix the Third: Linux Distribution

NixOS

- Built on top of nixpkgs and systemd
- Familiar to users of gentoo and arch
- Adds in modules for system-level configurability

Nix the Fourth: *misc* tooling

Tools worth knowing

- home-manager: nix for \$HOME
- nix-darwin: nix for macOS
- cachix: arbitrary caching for nix derivations
- Hercules CI: CI/CD for nix derivations

First party trick: nix for
managing development
environments

Misc tools for environment management

Tools we will use in this section

- direnv: automate environment switching in shell
- devshell: manage all your development tools per-project with a simple configuration file

Let's install direnv!

Installing direnv

- Go to <https://direnv.net/#basic-installation>
- Follow the NixOS instructions (because I'm not installing Homebrew, boo!) for non-NixOS systems
- Hook direnv into shell

Let's grab the code...

Clone me on GitHub

```
git clone  
https://github.com/flurie/nix-party-tricks.git
```

...and then let the magic take hold

direnv holds a **lot** of power, so be careful with what you allow.
Using nix with direnv provides an additional level of security.

Time to take the ride.

```
direnv allow
```

Tour our new powers



Figure 2: I'm in devshell! I'm in normal shell!

A note about creds

Be safe

- **Never** store credentials in a long-lived plaintext config file!
- use `credential_process` to grab creds safely

```
# ~/.aws/credentials
```

```
[default]
```

```
credential_process = access_keys_from_csv
```

Enter AWS with train

Set the stage for more magic

```
cp -r "$PRJ_ROOT"/support/.aws ~/.aws
```

You can try this at home, but don't leave the files sitting around.

Log in to AWS console

Create new programmatic IAM credentials

Download the csv to our devshell root

Time to test the thing out

Putting it all together

```
aws sts get-caller-identity
```

Second party trick: nix for
managing ec2s

Preamble

terraform to stand up the host

```
cd $PRJ_ROOT/terraform/ec2  
terraform init  
terraform apply
```

Misc tools for deployment management

Tools we will use in this section

- cachix: arbitrary caching for nix derivations
- deploy-rs: deploy NixOS to anywhere from anywhere
- nixos-generators: generate NixOS machine images of any kind

NixOS on AWS three ways

#1: ec2 user data

NixOS on AWS three ways - #1

```
# main.tf
resource "aws_instance" "nixos" {

  # ...some parts omitted

  root_block_device {
    # need this to be big enough to build things
    volume_size = 20
  }

  user_data = <<END
### https://nixos.org/channels/nixos-22.05 nixos

{ config, pkgs, modulesPath, ... }:
{
  # nix uses same string interpolation as terraform, so we must escape it here
  imports = [ "${modulesPath}/virtualisation/amazon-image.nix" ];
  ec2.hvm = true;
  system.stateVersion = "22.05";
  environment.systemPackages = with pkgs; [ nix-direnv direnv git ];
  networking.hostName = "nixos-aws";
}
END
}
```


NixOS on AWS three ways - #1

We can now enter the machine.

terraform output into ssh config file + hosts file line?

Make sure to use the IP given by terraform.

```
ssh -i /tmp/nixos-ssh.pem root@{IP}
```

NixOS on AWS three ways - #1

Let's pull down the party tricks repo here as well...

```
git clone  
https://github.com/flurie/nix-party-tricks.git
```

NixOS on AWS three ways - #1

...and activate the devshell!

```
cd nix-party-tricks && direnv allow
```

First way done!

NixOS on AWS three ways

#2: deploy-rs

NixOS on AWS three ways - #2

```
deploy = {
  nodes = {
    "aws" = {
      sshUser = "root";
      sshOpts = [ "-i" "/tmp/nixos-ssh.pem" ];
      hostname = "nixos-aws";
      profiles.hello = {
        path = deploy-rs.lib.x86_64-linux.activate.custom
          nixpkgs.legacyPackages.x86_64-linux.hello "./bin/hello";
      };
      profiles.system = {
        path = deploy-rs.lib.x86_64-linux.activate.nixos
          self.nixosConfigurations.aws;
      };
    };
  };
};
```

NixOS on AWS three ways - #2

Deploying to hostname, make sure it's in our
/etc/hosts

```
sudo echo "{IP} nixos-aws" >> /etc/hosts
```

NixOS on AWS three ways - #2

First deploy: "hello world"

```
# the -s skips the checks, saving us some time  
# don't do this at home  
deploy .#aws.hello -s
```

NixOS on AWS three ways - #2

Second deploy: NixOS system running nginx

```
{  
  services.nginx = { enable = true; };  
  networking.firewall.allowedTCPPorts = [ 80 ];  
}
```

Let's deploy!

```
deploy .#aws.system -s
```


NixOS on AWS three ways - #2

Now we should get the nginx splash page in a browser

visit `http://nixos-aws` in a browser

Second way done!

NixOS on AWS three ways

#3: nixos-generators

NixOS on AWS three ways #3

```
packages.x86_64-linux.awsImage = let system = "x86_64-linux";
in nixos-generators.nixosGenerate {
  pkgs = nixpkgs.legacyPackages.${system};
  modules = [
    # new hostname for new machine
    networking.hostName = "nixos-aws-ami";
    # mostly stuff you've seen before...
    services.nginx = {
      enable = true;
      virtualHosts.${networking.hostName} = {
        # except now we're serving something special
        root = "${self.packages.${system}.default}/www";
      };
    };
  ];
  format = "amazon";
};
```

NixOS on AWS three ways - #3

Let's use our shiny new ec2 for this!

But before we do, let's make our user creds available for the sake of simplicity.

```
# from our local
scp -i /tmp/nixos-ssh.pem ./${whoami}_accessKeys.csv \
    root@nixos-aws:~/nix-party-tricks/

ssh -i /tmp/nixos-ssh.pem root@nixos-aws
```

NixOS on AWS three ways - #3

Now let's build the image!

```
cd $PRJ_ROOT/terraform/ami  
terraform init  
terraform apply
```

If we're lucky, it will hit the cached version of my image and spare us.

If we're not, I made a trivial change at some point and never cached it, requiring a rebuild.

Declarative build systems are ruthless.

NixOS on AWS three ways - #3

Now we should get something special in a browser

visit `http://nixos-aws` in a browser

Third way done!



Third party trick: nix for
managing lambda runtimes

Preamble: more terraform for my lambda

Introducing a great nix feature: remote builders