Data on the Web: From Relations to Semistructured Data and XML (The Morgan Kaufmann Series in Data Management Systems) by Dan Suciu

Data on the Web: From Relations to Semistructured Data and XML is an examination of XML as a universal data transfer language and the theory behind the merging of the document-centric Web with a data-driven infrastructure. The book is intended as a textbook analysis of the issues, as well as background material for tool developers and others interested in the serious architectural details. Aimed at readers already familiar with database concepts, the book includes little introductory material. It quickly lays out the concepts of self-describing semi-structured data and how XML fits into this approach to data representation. The discussion deals with XML as a data transfer mechanism and not a presentation language. While there is a quick explanation of DTDs, Xlink, and XPointer, readers should be fairly familiar with XML before approaching this advanced title. The meat of the book revolves around query languages for XML. The authors present XML-QL and XSL in depth as examples. Then they move into much more advanced concepts such as schema formalisms, path constraints, and storage architectures. The book wraps up with a look at Lore and Strudel--two real-world systems that work with semi-structured data. Because of its intensive study of database and query theory, this textbook isn't for the ordinary Web developer. If data architectures are your expertise, however, Data on the Web may open new design doors. -- Stephen W. Plain

Topics covered:
Object database models, basic XML syntax, UnQL, XML-QL, XSL, StruQL, schema formalisms, extracting schemas from queries, semistructured data servers, Lore, Strudel, and XML-based database products.

My Personal Review:
For the most part, this book covers the academic research on semistructured database management that started in the mid-90s (pre-
dating the XML explosion - sometimes research is ahead of practice!). Such issues are not that interesting for folks who are doing bread-and-butter client-side XML development, and whose interest in XML and databases is limited to knowing how Oracle 8i implements its XML out the top package. However, the book is relevant to people who are already in the semistructured data management space - people who are thinking ahead to some of the potential directions that XML query languages might take, for example. The authors are prominent and well-respected in this area.

One of my main beefs with the book is that it does not really say anything about what XML databases might look like in practice. This is a tall and perhaps unfair order, since we dont yet have standards for XML schemas and query languages. But I have yet to see XML database proponents provide a clear and convincing explanation of why XML is going to be a way to structure stored data as well as a way of transmitting and reformatting data.

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