

Introduction to Databases

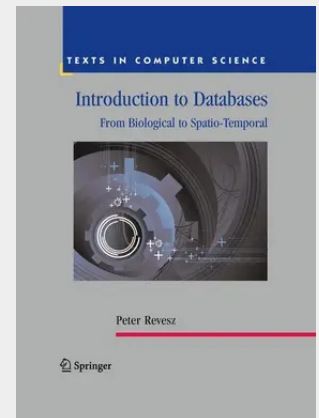
From Biological to Spatio-Temporal

Introduced forty years ago, relational databases proved unusually successful and durable. However, relational database systems were not designed for modern applications and computers. As a result, specialized database systems now proliferate trying to capture various pieces of the database market. Database research is pulled into different directions, and specialized database conferences are created. Yet the current chaos in databases is likely only temporary because every technology, including databases, becomes standardized over time. The history of databases shows periods of chaos followed by periods of dominant technologies. For example, in the early days of computing, users stored their data in text files in any format and organization they wanted. These early days were followed by information retrieval systems, which required some structure for text documents, such as a title, authors, and a publisher. The information retrieval systems were followed by database systems, which added even more structure to the data and made querying easier. In the late 1990s, the emergence of the Internet brought a period of relative chaos and interest in unstructured and "semistructured data" as it

was envisioned that every web page would be like a page in a book. However, with the growing maturity of the Internet, the interest in structured data was regained because the most popular websites are, in fact, based on databases. The question is not whether future data stores need structure but what structure they need.

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