



# a Coq retrospective - at the heart of Coq architecture, the genesis of version 7.0

Jean-Christophe Filliâtre

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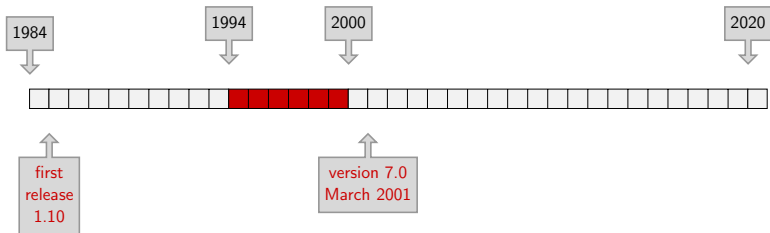
a Coq retrospective  
—  
at the heart of Coq architecture  
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Jean-Christophe Filliâtre  
CNRS

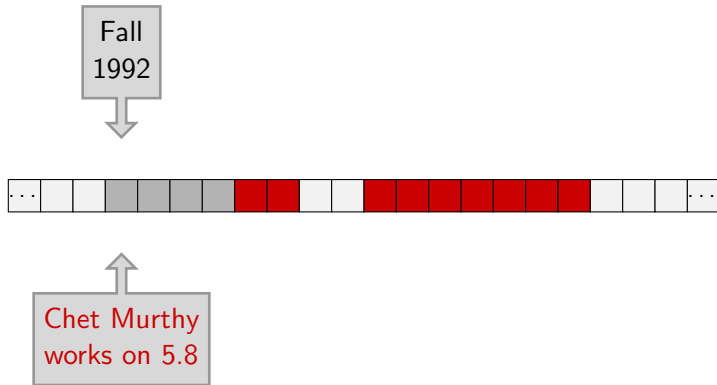
The Coq Workshop 2020

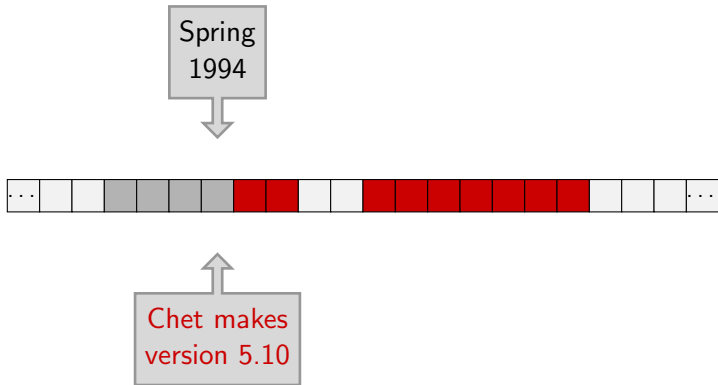
July 6, 2020

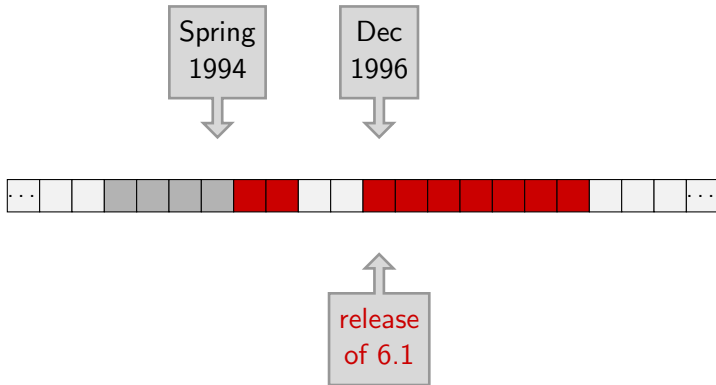
# 35 years of history

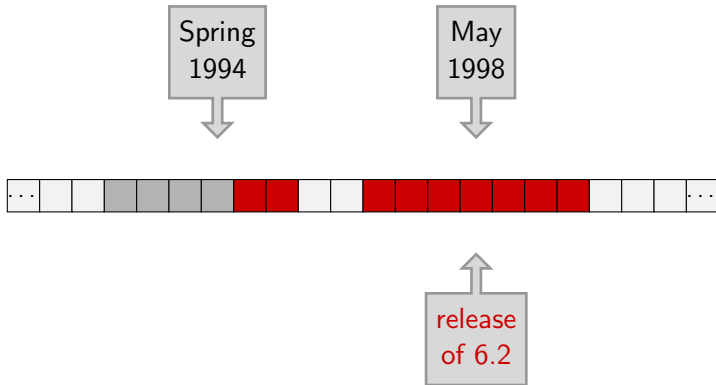




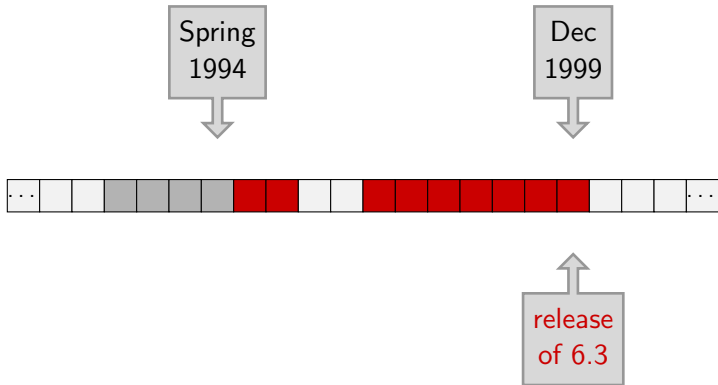


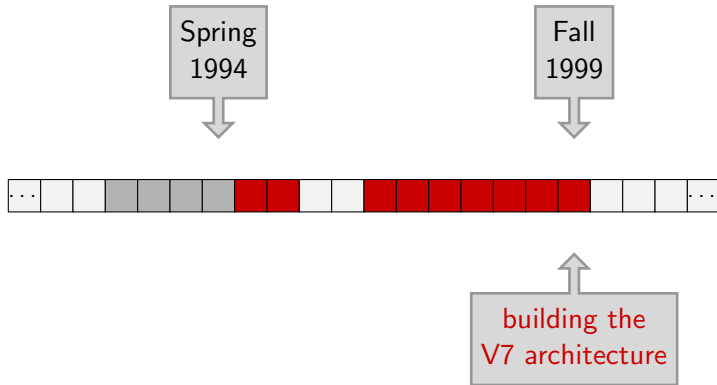












what was in Chet's 5.10

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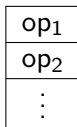
- **efficiency**
  - de Bruijn indices, space-efficient terms
  - hash-consed identifiers
  - efficient rollback mechanism (more later)
- **extensibility**
  - user-extensible grammar (parser, pretty-printer)
  - mechanisms to declare new tables/operations
- **separate compilation**
  - a Coq file is a separate module
  - it is compiled to a `.vo` file

1. when declaring a table, provide freeze/unfreeze operations

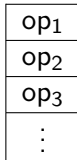
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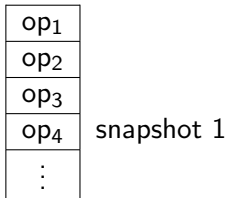


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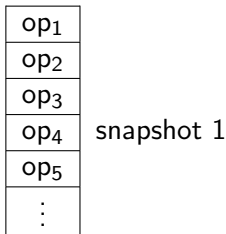




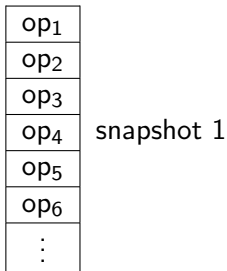
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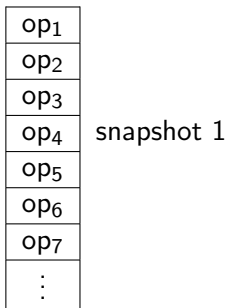
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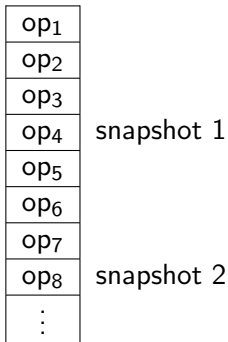
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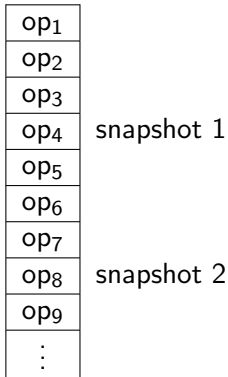
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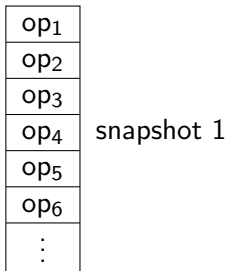
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2. a single stack of all operations (with a little bit of dynamic typing under the hood)
3. from time to time, take snapshots of all tables using freeze
4. to move back in time, roll back to the previous snapshot and redo some operations



```
let table = ref ...purely functional data structure...  
let freeze () = !table      (* O(1) *)  
let unfreeze v = table := v (* O(1) *)
```

assuming some flavor of balanced trees,  
this is only a  $O(\log N)$  overhead factor (time and space)

may even be less than that for space  
(depends on snapshot frequency)



## why changing something that works fine?

despite all its marvels, 5.10 had no such thing as a **kernel of trust** (and subsequently the versions 6)

the trusted computing base was a little bit everywhere

in particular,

- the rollback mechanism comes first
- CIC declarations are operations like any others

Coq version 7  
a new architecture, with a kernel

---

1. implement a purely functional type checker for the CIC  
(the kernel)
2. then the rollback mechanism  
(outside the kernel)
3. last, declare a table holding the current typing environment  
(in a reference)

even like this, the kernel is not small (7,800 loc at that time)

not convenient to put all that behind a single abstraction barrier  
(and no such thing as OCaml `-pack` back in 1999)

files for CIC terms

```
type constr = ...
```

```
...
```

can be ill-formed/ill-typed

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type constr = ...  
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files for CIC environments

```
type env = ...  
val add_constant:  
  env -> constant -> env  
...
```

just a data structure

environments can be ill-formed

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just a data structure

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files for typing rules

```
val type_constr:  
  env -> constr -> constr  
...
```

can be misused

finally, wrap everything behind an **abstraction barrier**

```
type safe_env
val empty: safe_env
val add_constant: safe_env -> constant -> safe_env
...
```



finally, wrap everything behind an **abstraction barrier**

```
type safe_env
val empty: safe_env
val add_constant: safe_env -> constant -> safe_env
...
```

whose implementation is trivial

```
type safe_env = env
let empty = Env.empty
let add_constant env c =
  let c = type_constant env c in
  Env.add_constant env c
...
```

outside the kernel, declare a **global**, mutable environment

```
let global_env = ref Kernel.empty
let add_constant c =
  global_env := Kernel.add_constant !global_env c
...
```

and declare it as a **table**

```
let freeze () = !global_env
let unfreeze v = global_env := v
let _ = declare_table "typing env" freeze unfreeze
```

one more issue: Coq's `Require` loads declarations from `.vo` files  
and all this machinery is outside of the kernel

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and all this machinery is outside of the kernel

the solution is borrowed from OCaml's compiler

- when writing a file to the disk,
  - include MD5 `checksums` of loaded modules
  - include its own checksum
- when loading a file,
  - `verify` that assumptions and reality coincide

if I had to do it again

---

- I would consider hash-consing+memoisation seriously
- I would consider a more defensive API for the kernel, with terms that are always well-typed

conclusion

---

deep thanks to

- Chet, for his code, for inspiring me
- Christine, for a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity

and to all the other Coq developers in 1994–1999

- Bruno Barras
- Cristina Cornes
- Yann Coscoy
- Judicaël Courant
- David Delahaye
- Daniel de Rauglaudre
- Eduardo Giménez
- Hugo Herbelin
- Gérard Huet
- Patrick Loiseleur
- César Muñoz
- Catherine Parent-Vigouroux
- Amokrane Saïbi
- Benjamin Werner



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**accept this idea** and make the best compromise you can

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- your code won't be the best cathedral ever; **accept this idea** and make the best compromise you can
- **postdoc** is a sweet spot, where you can combine experience with time