

Why Slow Communication ?

I did my PhD in molecular modelling. I would run molecular dynamics simulations for weeks, months, recording everyday slices of a slow-motion movie, megabytes of precious data generated *in silico*. I had plenty of time to think about how I would analyze these data and to learn about the very details of "my" system, a protein complex I would be living with for three years. Nowadays, nobody knows where time is hiding. At work, I feel mostly overwhelmed by the huge amount of available data, of freely accessible tools, of publications continuously coming out, of e-mails I need to read and flag as important... I have the impression that ideas are popping up in my mind like fireworks and I will never be able to test them. Increasing computing resources and algorithmic improvements make me realize every day that I am the limiting factor. I used to wait for the machine to give me an answer. Now the machine is waiting for me to give her an input. The answer comes faster than I can understand it. Eventually I have given up trying.

The rapid development of deep learning techniques and their expansion to virtually all fields of science questions the very notion of understanding. The reason why these architectures are so efficient in learning and making reliable predictions remains unknown. So does our ability to predict the extent to which they will help us build an artificial general intelligence. Artificial systems have already helped automatizing a great deal of everyday tasks and have invaded our lives. To share their playground, it feels like we urgently need to keep up the pace.

Slow communication is about taking the time for deep thinking. The purpose of this movement is to make us aware that we are not machines. We may be much more than that, or much less. In any case, we do believe that trying to mimic their behavior is a poor way of employing our resources. We also believe that one of our most precious resources, as human beings, is our ability to focus our attention. Answering to the many solicitations we receive through the many devices allowing us to communicate and interact in some way with people, data, artificial systems or the real physical world consumes this resource and ultimately reduces the substance of our interactions, and productions.

To go deep, let us go slow.