Second poster session in the Universitat de Barcelona

Tonight at 19:45 we will hold the poster session for papers presented during yesterday and today in the Claustre de Ciències of the historic building of Universitat de Barcelona. This is an historic construction initially designed in 1863 and for which the works lasted for more than twenty years; the first lectures started already by 1863, however. Don't miss the clock and the iron bell housed in the tower in the Pati de Lletres nor the carefully tended botanic garden of the building.

La Mercè

Every year, close to the end of September, the city celebrates its official festival. The festival commemorates the Roman Catholic feast day of Our Lady of Mercy, “La Mare de Déu de la Mercè” in Catalan, patron saint of the city. The holiday is on September 24, and there will be hundreds of activities and events during the week around it. Here are some recommendations:

- Check the English program online: http://www.bcn.cat/merce/docs/en/program.pdf
- Processions with the city giants; the fire run (“correfoc”) with dragons, gunpowder and explosions; human towers (castells); and many traditional activities.
- There is a yearly festival where three firework manufacturers compete. After today’s poster session, go to the Barceloneta beach to watch the fireworks by the Canadian team at 10pm. Friday is the turn for the French team, and Saturday is for the Valencian team.
- Sept. 23-24, many museums of the city are open door (=FREE)!
- BAM music festival: Belle & Sebastian, Anti-Pop Consortium, Maika Makovski, and many other groups from the emerging musical scene. Also, in various stages in squares and avenues, flamenco, salsa, reggae, world music, ...

How long until computers become smart?

Intelligent interaction with the real world

In the early years of AI research, many scientists aimed at building intelligent machines that could behave similarly to humans. Although creating such machines might require a little more time than what they expected, some progress has been made towards this direction. Prof. Kaelbling will propose a view to achieve this goal, and point out practical and theoretical hurdles that must be jumped over before crossing the finish line.

Leslie Pack Kaelbling is Professor of Computer Science and Engineering in the CS and AI Lab at MIT. In addition to her Ph. D. in Computer Science from Stanford, Prof. Kaelbling holds an A.B. in Philosophy. As our other invited speakers, she received numerous awards and has been quite active in the AI community. She notably founded the Journal of Machine Learning Research, and has been elected a fellow of the AAAI.
Castells

Castells (meaning “castles”) are the most unique manifestation of Catalan folklore. Casteller troupes build human towers of different heights and shapes, crowned by children sometimes as young as 5-6 years. The record in height, achieved on a few rare occasions, is 10 floors. A large castle may involve up to 600 people, and a casteller at its bottom may be holding 450+ kilos on his shoulders. While the construction may seem a bit haphazard and rough to outsiders, no detail is left for improvisation and sheer force isn’t the main factor. Every single person in the castell has his/her specific place and mission. The technique for climbing up and down, including children, is precisely codified and rehearsed. The music is not for fun, but for synchronizing movements and informing those inside the castle of what is going on.

There will be two castell shows during la Mercè, both on Plaça Sant Jaume in the Old Town: On Friday 24th at 12:30, several Barcelona-based troupes will act; expect to see mostly 7-8 floor castells. On Sunday 26th, at 12:00, the largest Barcelona troupe will host the currently two best troupes; expect to see several 9-floor castles.

Note: it will be hot and extremely crowded. Carry some water and a hat.

Catalan cuisine

Take the opportunity to try some unique dishes of the Catalan Cuisine. “Escalivada” is a mix of grilled eggplants, peppers and onions, great to eat with “pa amb tomàquet”.

“Esqueixada” is a fresh salad with salted cod, tomatoes and onions. Catalans have a huge passion for wild mushrooms, and the season is starting now. Try them just sautéed (“bolets saltejats”), mixed with scrambled eggs (“remenat de bolets”), in a risotto, or in a meat stew.

Catalan cuisine is also known for some eccentric combinations. We find mixes of salty and sweet flavors in cod with honey (“bacalla amb mel”) or duck with pears (“anec amb peres”). Very typical also are the sea-and-mountain dishes, combining seafood with meat, like in chicken with lobster (“pollastre i llagosta”), or meatballs with squid (“mandonguilles amb sepia”). Common denominator: all excellent!