

The Spectacle of Seismicity: Making Art from Earthquakes

Ella Mudie

It is on the San Andreas Fault, recognized worldwide as the primary fault in a web of fault lines sprawling along the California coastline, that one finds the tiny town of Parkfield, self-proclaimed earthquake capital of the world. The title is hyperbolic yet apt, for the region experiences moderate magnitude-6.0 earthquakes at regular intervals and, since 1985, has been the site of an extensive earthquake research program led by the U.S. Geological Survey known as the Parkfield Earthquake Experiment. It is also here that, on the morning of 18 August 2008, the residents of this remote rural township awoke to another type of rumbling. After 77 days spent preparing and assembling his installation, artist D.V. Rogers was ready to flick the switch on a re-engineered earthquake shake table, dubbed the *PIEQF* (*Parkfield Interventional EQ Fieldwork*), and make the machine go live [1].

A seismic monitoring project situated at the intersection between art and the earth sciences, the *PIEQF* is a recent installment in a small but growing number of works concerned with translating traces of earthquake activity into art. This paper takes as its focus the performative aspects of these transformations in order to consider the role that artists might play in creating new avenues for understanding and engaging with seismic phenomena as well as their capacity to provoke consideration of the ways we cope with and respond to the risks and threats to human life that earthquakes entail.

I begin with a selection of installation and performative works engaged with the telematic properties of seismic data by artists Rogers, Natalie Jeremijenko and Ken Goldberg, followed by a brief contrasting examination of historical treatments of seismic events in Japanese woodblock prints. Not only serving as a point of contrast, these woodblocks made in the immediate aftermath of earthquakes may be seen to embody an ambivalence in the artists' visual representations of earthquakes and their causes and consequences. Finally, consideration will also be given to the metaphorical interpretations of two new media artists, Susan Norrie and Christina McPhee, whose video and digital representations of seismic activity and its associated phenomena pose questions about the nature of memory and psychological states such as fear, shock, anxiety and trauma, as well as broader environmental concerns.

I introduce the notion of *spectacle* to this discussion for a number of reasons. Earthquakes are, by their very nature, spectacular phenomena, and the artists discussed in this paper contend with this in varying ways. In the formulations of such theorists as Guy Debord, the idea of spectacle has assumed pejorative connotations, bearing an emphasis on alienated

and passive viewing experiences and their commodity function in a media environment that privileges entertainment over engagement [2]. I do not seek to argue simply that, as earthquakes are spectacular, therefore any artwork depicting an earthquake must in some way be a spectacle. Rather, spectacle emerges as a tension in works in which artists seek to counteract passive experiences of seismic activity by taking up such strategies as interactivity and viewer participation and, in film, the use of disruptive and non-linear narratives, montage and unconventional documentary techniques, to implicate the viewer in the process of making meaning from these highly charged representations.

TRIGGER, THE LOMA PRIETA PONY

Just as the San Andreas Fault occupies a powerful mythological function in the history of earthquakes in the United States, so too does the magnitude-6.9 Loma Prieta Earthquake that shook the San Francisco Bay area in 1989, although for quite different reasons. Striking during a World Series baseball game, the quake by chance became the first American earthquake to be broadcast live on television. It is data from this particular quake (obtained from the United States Geological

ABSTRACT

Representations of earthquakes in visual art have the potential to function as spectacles (defined as striking or dramatic public displays); this in turn provokes consideration of how viewers construct meaning from such representations. The author examines the work of a number of artists arguably concerned with going beyond spectacular representations in their portrayals of earthquake activity. Particular focus is placed upon performative techniques meant not only to engage audiences with the properties of seismic phenomena but also to stimulate reflection on the complex psychological responses they may trigger, as well as their analogous relationships to conditions of environmental and cultural crisis.

Fig. 1. Ken Goldberg, Randall Packer, Gregory Kuhn and Wojciech Matusik, *Mori*, 2003. Gallery visitors experience live seismic data streaming via an acoustic installation at the Kitchen, New York City. (© Ken Goldberg. Photo: Jared Charney.)



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Survey) that artist Natalie Jeremijenko made physical in her 1995 “information-rendering device” *Trigger; The Loma Prieta Pony* [3]—an early instance of an artwork that activated seismic data to facilitate user interactivity while simultaneously reactivating a traumatic cultural memory through the subversion of an entertainment device.

At first glance, *Trigger* could be a typical coin-operated bucking horse, a children’s amusement common in fairgrounds and shopping centers. Closer inspection, however, revealed that the artist had tinkered with its motor, for when the pony was activated, specially engineered motion chips caused its bucking to follow the ground motion acceleration of the 1989 Loma Prieta quake. First exhibited at Southern Exchange, an artist-run space in San Francisco, as an interactive and educational demonstration of seismic information, *Trigger* was also a natural fit for the “hands-on” San Francisco science-art museum the Exploratorium, where it was later presented as a temporary exhibit.

This framing of the ride as an educational device, however, does not annul its deliberate perversity. On the contrary, the

artist assumed a provocative stance in her activation of the seismic data. At the front of the saddle was placed a small black horn, which, the artist points out, “makes it unusually uncomfortable for some genders, but not others” [4]. This dystopian dimension brings to mind the transgressions of J.G. Ballard’s novel *Crash*, in which characters numbed by pain seek titillation in the catastrophic encounter of the car accident. *Trigger* may not be nearly so extreme, yet it too points to an uneasy relationship between risk and excitement. It also issues a challenge to observers of scientific demonstrations not simply to take as neutral the information presented in educational displays, especially those incorporating an entertainment function, but rather to scrutinize the values implicit in such models and to pit them against some kind of critical assessment.

For Jeremijenko, this early investigation into seismicity also proved significant in shaping the direction of future art projects, some of which reference earthquakes directly and others only obliquely. Working with the artist-engineer collective the Bureau of Inverse

Technology, Jeremijenko later developed the bangbang webcam, an ongoing on-line art project that employed a network of sensor-activated cameras installed in 15 geologically and politically sensitive sites across the globe to “report on the sound of live gun fire; or other triggers and events of interest” [5], including seismic activity. Similarly, the artist’s early experiments in testing soil for traces of seismic events proved relevant in subsequent spin-offs such as the *Robotic Feral Dogs* (2005), which involved reconfiguring toy dogs into open-source robots capable of sniffing out urban sites contaminated by radioactive material.

MORI

In discussing contemporary examples of “earthquake art,” the risk of creating a misimpression arises. Prior to this paper, the term has been used by Rogers on his *PIEQF* web site, where he makes reference to “earthquake art” and presents a number of relevant projects, while Stephen Wilson also presents a list of seismic artworks in his 2002 title *Information Arts*

Fig. 2. Ken Goldberg, *Ballet Mori*, 2006. Ballerina Muriel Maffre from the San Francisco Ballet improvises to the sound of seismic movement. (© Ken Goldberg. Photo © Erik Tomasson.)



[6], including artist and engineer Ken Goldberg's collaborative seismic installation *Mori* [7]. Yet for the most part, artists who have referenced or portrayed earthquakes have done so as part of larger and more eclectic bodies of work. Goldberg's *Mori*, for example, stems from a larger body of Internet-based artworks concerned with exploring the implications of tele-presence in an artistic context, while also engaging with live seismic data over a series of three companion works that, in varying ways, stimulate meditative responses in the viewer. Beginning in 1997 with *Memento Mori*, the live Internet display of a seismogram, this ongoing work continued in 1999 with a large-scale acoustic gallery installation simply titled *Mori*. First exhibited at the ICC Biennale in Tokyo, this installation showed live seismic data from the Hayward Fault in California (as measured by the Berkeley Strecheisen STS-1 seismometer) converted into digital signals that were then transmitted continuously via the Internet to a sound installation in the gallery [8]. Visitors entered the darkened space through a curtain, which transformed the gallery into a type of walk-through theater. Inside, banisters and a glowing fiber-optic cable directed the visitor to walk a spiral path toward the focal point of the room: a circular rail that encased a monitor installed on the floor (Fig. 1). Here the viewer's downward gaze encountered the beaming angular lines of a seismogram, a visual reference to the seismic movements made telematically present in the gallery space, suggestive of a continuity with the indoor earthworks of such land artists as Robert Smithson concerned particularly with the "dialectic of interior and exterior locations" [9].

From Latin, *memento mori* translates as, "Remember you will die," and the nod to this phrase in the title of Goldberg's *Mori* further implies that the phantasmagoria of the installation is not to be seen as mere shock-and-awe theatrics. Historically, *memento mori* were "fetish" items that contained some trace of their former owners' presences, such as strands of hair, which their inheritors would contemplate to recall memories of the deceased persons. In Victorian times, this was considered not morbid but life-affirming. In the context of the *Mori* installation, the computer monitor and the powerful visual symbolism of the seismogram can be seen as modern-day *memento mori*; vehicles prompting remembrance not only for past earthquakes but also an appreciation of the often-indiscernible presence of a geological phenomenon both sublime and terrible.

In linking the installation to the Berkeley seismometer, *Mori* also assumes a certain scientific authority that arguably brings with it moral and ethical obligations. This tension over the extent to which seismic data can be creatively interpreted later appears as a theme in Goldberg's second seismic artwork, *Ballet Mori* [10]. In this 2006 performance, staged to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, seismic data from the Hayward Fault was again streamed live from the Berkeley seismometer, but this time to the San Francisco Opera House. Here, the data was translated into a soundscape with the addition of atmospheric natural sounds by multimedia artist and composer Randall Packer, which were then taken as triggers for an 8-minute improvisational dance by San Francisco Ballet dancer Muriel Maffre (Fig. 2).

Maffre's improvisation, however, was not completely free, as each of her dance steps had to be drawn from a vocabulary of movements pre-choreographed by fellow dancer Yuri Possokhov. The stage in *Ballet Mori*, then, can be envisaged as a space of controlled risk, where events were both dictated by planned elements and subject to indeterminacy through improvisation and the possibility of failure. At the same time, the streaming of the seismic data was completely live. Risk and the threat of destabilization served to intensify the drama, yet these were more than simply theatrical devices. Rather, the curtailing of the ballet dancer's artful attempts to transcend gravity served

as a reminder of the insurmountable nature of physical limitations. Also, despite the apparent futurism of the seismic data streaming, the fact that such records can only image movements that have already occurred heightened the pathos of the performance.

PARKFIELD INTERVENTIONAL EQ FIELDWORK

As both Jeremijenko's *Trigger* and Goldberg's *Mori* demonstrate, site is a significant factor in the conceptual underpinnings of installations concerned with rendering seismic data. It seems fitting that works like *Mori*, installed in locations where significant losses of life have occurred, should assume a certain elegiac character. In the case of Rogers, the high levels of seismic activity in Parkfield was a major determining factor in his selection of the site for the geologically interactive, kinetic *PIEQF*. As the *PIEQF* was principally concerned with visualizing quake activity in real time, the site of Parkfield derived resonance from the frequency of its seismic activity, in contrast to the sites of Goldberg's and Jeremijenko's installations, where place was linked to historical and cultural memories of tragic seismic events.

Taking place across a 91-day monitoring period (additional to its installation time) in 2008, the *PIEQF* saw the artist create a temporary intervention into the geologic landscape of California through the installation of a re-engineered earthquake shake table in an excavated trench

Fig. 3. D.V. Rogers, the *PIEQF* shake table installed at Parkfield, California, as captured by Kite Aerial Photography, 2008. (© D.V. Rogers. Photo: Scott Haefner, U.S. Geological Survey.)

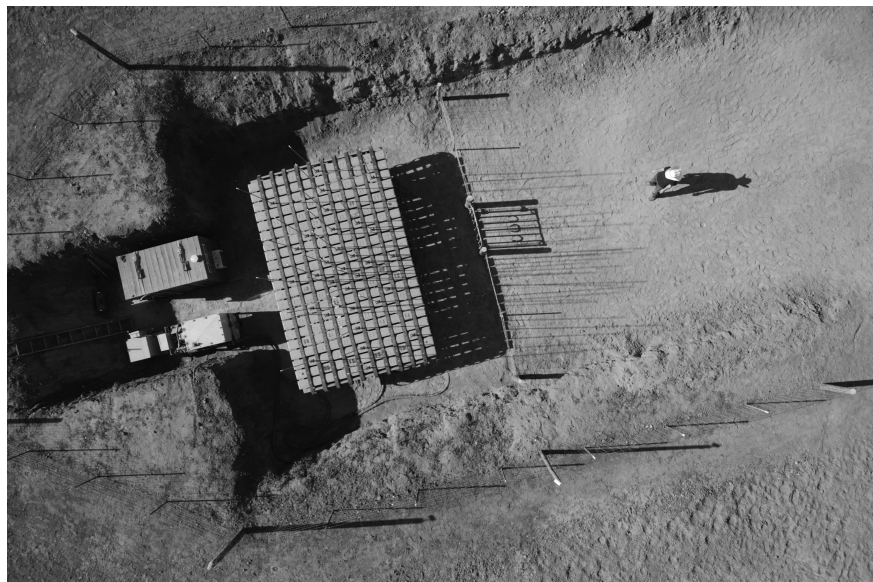




Fig. 4. D.V. Rogers, *PIEQF* shake table installed in the trench outside Parkfield, 2008. (© D.V. Rogers) The grid of steel rods oscillates when triggered by seismic or human movements.

just outside of Parkfield (Fig. 3). In seismic research, such tables are typically employed to subject structural models and building components to conditions representative of true earthquake ground motions as a means of testing their performance, periods of vibration and flexibility under such conditions [11]. This particular table, however, was a readymade with a history of public display, having been appropriated from Sydney's Earth Exchange Museum, where it had initially served as an entertainment attraction and an education device that simulated the magnitude-5.7 earthquake that shook the Australian steel town of Newcastle in 1989. Prior to installing the table in Parkfield, Rogers introduced a series of modifications that served to increase its sensitivity to the site in a number of ways.

Working with a team of software programmers, Rogers added a system of geophone earthquake sensors to the earth surrounding the table to register ground motion from visitors to the site, causing

the table to shake and rattle when disturbed. These sensors also proved sensitive enough to pick up on movement from nearby passing cars, wild animals and weather patterns [12]. At the same time, the *PIEQF* was linked to the U.S. Geological Survey's on-line seismic network, so that the shake table, when active, also responded to all earthquakes above magnitude 1.0 that took place in California during the monitoring period (i.e. about 40 per day). A grid of steel rods attached to the bench of the table then oscillated whenever the shake table was triggered (Fig. 4), making visible in a dramatic fashion a vast number of subterranean seismic rumblings that would normally have passed unnoticed.

In this way, viewer participation became a critical element of the installation, not as an end in itself, but as one trigger or actor in an ecology-like field of exchanges among energy- and time-generating mechanisms. Like Jeremijenko's art-science "spectacles of participation" [13], this assimilation of the visitor into a

network of interactive processes resulting in a spectacular display complicates conventional understandings of the notion of spectacle as an isolating experience. This contradiction is not easily resolved, yet it may be considered in the context of a growing number of experiential or immersive artworks that appear to draw on spectacular techniques as a means of critiquing the spectacle. In response to works like Carsten Holler's monumental *Test Sites* and the public interventions of Pierre Huyghe, for example, the Tate Modern hosted the 2007 symposium *Rethinking Spectacle*, which sought to consider how spectacle might function "less as a theatrical presentation that may be viewed from the outside than as an increasingly intimate disciplining function that produces new types of subjectivities" [14].

In the case of the *PIEQF*, the animation of the remade shake table via a series of interactive processes introduced a "conceptual intervention within geological time," according to Rogers [15], giving

way to a subjectivity-engendering appreciation of the immensity of deep time. At the same time, the table also assumed a performative function when it was “live” and charged by seismic triggers. Not only did it come to resemble an automaton, uncanny and Frankensteinian in the way it shuddered, convulsed and lurched forward in the trench in response to these events; it also became a stage where the performance of human-made structures was actively tested against natural forces over an extended period of time.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLE: JAPANESE WOODPRINTS

The *PIEQF* was also an ephemeral work; when the 3-month monitoring period was complete, the table was removed from the trench, which was then topped with soil, resulting essentially in a “no-trace” [16] intervention into the landscape. The notion of traces and mark-making is particularly relevant in the context of art that records seismic events, for the earliest accurate records of earthquakes were in fact drawings and engravings (made after the 1755 Lisbon quake [17]), while in Japan, the making of woodblock prints proliferated in the aftermath of great quakes. The drawing of these prints was arguably performative in the way many sought to re-enact, and even prolong, the moment of collapse. These records also could become politicized, as artists, mostly anonymous, took to the rapid production of prints as a means to express collective anxieties, discontents and even aspirations for change amidst the devastation.

Writing about the cultural politics of Japanese seismicity in *Earthquake Nation*, Gregory Clancey points to the sensational nature of the multi-colored woodblock prints made in the aftermath of the Great Nobi Earthquake of 1891, many showing apocalyptic scenes “more allegorical than real . . . the favorite subject of the illustrators is the collapse or destruction of Western-style icons—brick buildings, railroad bridges, telegraph wires, and even railroad trains” [18]. In this way, the rendering of quake wreckage in the prints brought to the fore the fallibility of Western ideals of architecture and engineering that were spreading via an accelerated process of globalization and, up until the point of the Nobi quake, had not been questioned in Japan.

Less than four decades earlier, the Ansei Earthquake of 1855 similarly acted as a catalyst for economic change in the affected area of Edo (now Tokyo). Here, attitudes to the redistribution of wealth that



Fig. 5. Unknown artist, *The Catfish That Causes Earthquakes*, Japanese woodblock print, 19th century. (Image courtesy the Jan Kozak Collection, University of California, Berkeley Earthquake Engineering Library.)

the rebuilding process facilitated were expressed in the hundreds of unsigned *namazu-e* (catfish) prints circulated in the aftermath of the quake. These prints showed citizens in dramatic battles with a mythical monster catfish that, according to Japanese folk legend, lived under the earth, where it was kept under control by the Kashima Deity, who held it down with a rock or sword (Fig. 5). Movements of the catfish were said to be the cause of earthquakes. However, in the case of the Ansei quake, allegorical representations also served political purposes, as the fish, given human-like qualities, became a means for ridiculing wealthy citizens, and eventually this subversive quality led to the authorities banning their publication [19]. At a deeper level, the ambivalent portrayal of the catfish’s latent power as either an agent of destruction or a generative force for renewal and change also appears to answer the need to make sense of the quake in ways that would engender a shift in perspective to find some positives in the face of tremendous loss and chaos.

METAPHORICAL TRANSLATIONS: SUSAN NORRIE

If the *namazu-e* catfish prints have come to be seen as a cultural artifact of a folklore tradition in which anxieties over natural disasters were exorcised and explored through allegorical portrayals of a quasi-human monster, a more contemporary correlation may be drawn between the prints and the spectacular horror films of

the Godzilla series. Godzilla, not unlike his catfish antecedent, is a gigantic anthropomorphic beast of aquatic origins, and likewise his representations have varied from early films in which he was portrayed as a destructive villain to his later incarnations as a hero capable of defeating and protecting against a variety of monsters, aliens and other threats.

It is fitting, then, that painter and video artist Susan Norrie, who has made extensive representations of both natural and human-made disasters in her large-scale multi-screen video installations, should turn her focus to Godzilla, in a small series of paintings simply titled the *Godzilla Series* (2005). In one particularly atmospheric black-and-white painting, *Mothra*, a reference to the film *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, the mutant Godzilla is depicted in battle with the giant winged insect Mothra. The confrontation takes place mid-flight and is painted against the backdrop of a blackened sky, suggestive of the aftermath of an atomic bomb. Norrie writes of her inspiration for the paintings, “After making ‘Undertow,’ and my trip to Japan in 2002, I became fascinated with the Japanese way of dealing with trauma and catastrophe. This small island not only dealt with the atomic bomb, but continues to deal with the disasters nature can serve up, from earthquakes to tsunamis and volcanic eruptions” [20].

This battle between Godzilla and Mothra arguably embodies a metaphorical struggle that the artist has extensively mapped in her video works, in which footage of natural phenomena, including seismic activity, not only signals en-



Fig. 6. Christina McPhee, *SALT*, video still, 720 × 480 pixels, 2004. (© Christina McPhee)
A figure tracks the landscape of the Carrizo Plain at Soda Lake, California, for aftershocks.

vironmental distress but also is meant to absorb the viewer, thus dissolving our sense of separateness from the natural world. In Norrie's epic 2002 six-channel DVD installation *Undertow*, for example, film of a looming dust storm and other tumultuous natural forces is combined with film references to Armageddon and an eerie, rumbling soundscape, making simultaneously for a meditation on the sublime force of nature and a terror-inducing work, so the viewer is both seduced and frightened by the impending threat of catastrophe. A similar tension arises in the multi-faceted 2007 video installation *Havoc*, although here the conflict is complicated by its representation of a human-made natural disaster in the third world and its engagement with a site where seismicity has had political implications.

It is in the Porong region in East Java, Indonesia, that one finds the site to which Norrie traveled in 2006, along with cameraman David MacKenzie and journalist Justin Hale, to capture footage of a mud volcano that displaced over 10,000 people after its eruption in that year. Two days before this initial rupture, the region was affected by a moderate-sized earthquake. Despite attempts by the local mining industry to make a causal link between the quake and the explosion, later tests by a team of scientists made a strong case identifying irresponsible drilling practices as the cause of the rupture. In the resulting *Havoc*, then, the spectacle that draws in and amazes viewers with dramatic images depicting the awesome

force of the volcano, with its billowing clouds of vapor and floods toppling local houses like playing cards, is complicated by the fact the viewer is challenged to consider humanity's responsibility in causing, or at least triggering, this devastating phenomenon. At the same time, the film bears witness to a variety of human actions, from the movements of the mining industry that continues to drill in the region and the futile attempts of local villagers to stop the inevitable tide of mud to the making of animal sacrifices at the site of the rupture, lending gravity to the realization that, while humans are able to effect changes in the natural environment, ultimately we may be powerless to reverse or stop the fallout of such phenomena.

THE CARRIZO-PARKFIELD DIARIES

Where Susan Norrie's video works scan the globe for examples of unstable thermodynamic phenomena, one finds similar concerns played out in the work of California-based multimedia artist Christina McPhee, although here the artist closely documents the landscape in which she lives and works. Working in seismically active regions including Parkfield and the Carrizo Plain on the San Andreas Fault, McPhee has for several years been engaged in the making of topological site studies of regions that dramatically bear the scars of billions of years of geological slippage. Her poetic and multi-layered interpretations of

these seismically active landscapes are executed in diverse media, including interrelated video suites, large-scale digital and chromogenic prints, graphite drawings on paper and photomontage.

Like Norrie's, McPhee's contemporary works also retain the painterly quality of her former choice of medium, yet the artist's shift toward digital media in 2001 marked a definite change in her approach to representation. In digital media, McPhee locates ways of objectifying psychic states such as trauma, nightmares and hypnogogic dreaming such that they become disembodied through the use of digital tools. In her primary suite of work exploring seismicity, the *Carrizo-Parkfield Diaries*, the "self" is dislocated—emotional and psychological states are alluded to in the digital representation of the seismic landscape with its cracks, its tremors, its aftershocks, but ultimately there is no linear narrative or plot line to be followed.

This is discernible in the video work *SilkyVRML422 (v.2)*, for example, in which the artist creates a "self-portrait at surface." However, the title is ironic, for the portrait is not self-representational in any conventional sense, nor are the *Carrizo-Parkfield* works "diaries" in the way one normally expects. In this suite of interrelated works, the diary or portrait is transfigured into a conceptual repository in which records of geological events are stored and the self is constructed through analogy. The complex layering of different elements (Color Plate E)—from sound recordings, animations, field drawings, photographic stills and video footage to VRML visualizations and seismic data—combine to create dreamlike, mythic landscapes that resonate with the viewer's own interiority and psychic states in ways both irrational and disruptive.

In this way, the artist's treatment of seismic data and events cannot be interpreted as straightforward visualizations. As such, they are neither purely scientific nor documentary. In the 9 min, 25 sec video *SALT*, McPhee begins with splicings of television news footage covering the carnage of the 2003 6.5 San Simeon Earthquake. However, whereas a news report is a short narrative that condenses the most sensational elements for full dramatic impact, what unfolds in McPhee's digital scape—a lone figure "wired for sound" tracks the landscape for aftershocks—is nuanced, mysterious and evocative (Fig. 6). This arguably reflects the artist's ambivalent stance toward spectacle in representations of seismicity and a commitment to showing not only the dramatic incidents but also

the long intervals of nothingness between them, which she describes as Beckett-like stretches of endless waiting. In this way, “documentation must address what’s felt, what’s in the air, what’s feared and also what may not be seen” [21].

CONCLUSION

In the topological studies of McPhee, seismic events, then, are envisaged as triggers that activate an otherwise-dormant landscape. It is this triggering phenomenon that underpins the artist’s concept of “seismic memory,” which draws a correlation between seismicity and the human mind, particularly in relation to how traumatic memory may be reactivated by familiar yet often indeterminate events. In this way, it becomes clear that the outcomes artists achieve in working with seismic data and phenomena vary greatly. As Norrie and McPhee’s digital documentations reveal, seismic activity can be rendered analogous to human states of mind while also acting as a visual barometer for conditions of distress in the natural environment. At the other end of the spectrum, artworks engaged with the telematic properties of seismic monitoring, such as those made by Jeremijenko, Goldberg and Rogers, can give way to an appreciation of technology’s capacity to bring the viewer into “contact” with events taking place at some distance while simultaneously pointing to the limitations of these immaterial encounters.

Yet, while the outcomes vary, there is a common thread inherent in these works that stems from the very nature of seismicity itself. This is embedded even in the etymology of the word *seismicity*, which comes from the Greek *seismos*, to shock, and from *seien*, to shake [22]. Thus just as earthquakes shake, they also shock, and

it is their shock value that arguably makes earthquakes so noteworthy in the sense described by the term *spectacle*. This is a conundrum artists must respond to and, unlike the scientist, they have the liberty of abstraction at their disposal. The artists discussed in this paper, however, employ abstraction with caution. Performative elements become crucial to the works, as these are taken up to engage the viewer rather than as a means of simply making the work entertaining. Ultimately, the artists appear most concerned with creating representations and models of seismicity that redirect public attention and awareness, through controlled spectacle, to a natural occurrence that all too often lies unacknowledged in a type of collective amnesia until the moment disaster strikes.

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Re-Imagining the Moon

Guest Editor: Sundar Sarukkai

Human exploration of the moon has become the subject of renewed interest, with upcoming space missions from all the space-faring nations, as well as private companies. In late 2008 the Indian Space Agency, ISRO, launched the *Chandrayaan 1* mission to the moon.

The moon has profoundly influenced the human imagination over the centuries, in the domains of myths, religion, art and science. A variety of cultures have generated rich narratives about the moon. The moon is more than a mere object—it is also an image, an illusion, a picture. It inspires stories about lunacy as well as love. It has regulated our lives in a fundamental way by catalyzing calendars based on its movement. Stories of navigation are incomplete without the shadow presence of the moon.

The engagement of poetry, art and literature with the moon has had a profound influence on these activities. The moon also has a political significance—new space projects related to the moon by countries such as Japan, China and India are fundamentally tied to the new articulations of what these countries are and want to be.

The *Leonardo* Special Section “Re-Imagining the Moon” will remind us of this historical, cultural and scientific trajectory in which the moon plays an important part even as it suggests new, *contemporary reflections* on the moon. The section aims to publish articles from a variety of disciplines and hopes to receive articles that explore various social and cultural aspects related to the moon as well as those that engage with the relation between the moon and the artistic and scientific imaginations. Reflecting the universality of this influence, we seek articles from countries and cultures throughout the world.

We are also particularly interested in documenting artists’ projects connected to current space exploration missions to the moon and collaborations between artists, scientists and engineers on moon projects.

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