

# ***Carrizo-Parkfield Diaries: notes from the underground***

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Some time ago I participated in a discussion on the topic 'Aesthetic of the catastrophes' ([http://www.noemalab.org/sections/ideas/ideas\\_articles/estetica\\_catastrofi.html](http://www.noemalab.org/sections/ideas/ideas_articles/estetica_catastrofi.html)), where it brought back Thom's theory of the catastrophes. It assimilates the catastrophe at the moment of the transformation between two different states (orders). I put the accent on the transformation, that moment of unstable equilibrium between two varying equilibriums that could not be immediately classified, short like a quake or infinitely slow, nearly imperceptible to our senses. I thought deeply about the role of the feeling of the catastrophe, its emotional impact, inasmuch as if analyzed theoretically it seemed to lose the sense of the tragic inborn in the term.

Other aspects had been discussed, but one had not emerged: the memory.

And it's just this that Christina McPhee and Jeremy Hight explore in *Carrizo-Parkfield Diaries*, fusing a unique connection between memory, trauma and geomorfology. They make it through a multimedia installation that is related to the short catastrophic moment of the seismic event, more specifically with the continuous telluric movements of the S. Andreas Fault in California, between Carrizo Plains and Parkfield.

The complete installation is visible at the Transport Gallery in Los Angeles until April 16th, but there are the on-line diaries ([www.carrizoparkfelddiaries.net](http://www.carrizoparkfelddiaries.net)) as well as the video images of the place and digital chromographic prints. The diaries are comprised of sounds and music contained in flash movies triggered from a number sequence, fed and updated every hour by data coming from the seismic activity of that place in California. This data 'crashes' into a database containing data of the last big earthquake, and this 'collision' triggers the animations, but not in accidental way: "the number values determine what is pulled, so a higher number value, meaning stronger quake, triggers different animation... stronger new quake, more intense the trauma in writing and image...".

The mechanism is not explicit, but looking at the diaries we can notice some more intense animations: "the human trauma moves like the landscape trauma, like they are the same...". This unusual narrative hits for the atmosphere that is able to create, with indistinct images, intermittent and sometimes grinding music, words giving the idea of lived life, fragments of post-trauma memories of people with different experiences.

Like Thom, Hight sees a process of continuity in the seismic event: "The quake energy in the ground is chaotic, and yet has structure, movement... then it ends and the ground and landscape has to adjust, show damage, continuous resonating for a time (aftershocks) and, in a sense, has physical memory". Crossing searches on psychology, identity, trauma and geomorfology, Hight compares the human memory to the experience of the traumatic event. As a person's experience of an event in different ways depends on the previous moments they have lived, also earthquakes can be different according to the ground: "... this happened in the last Saint Francisco quake: the ground in north beach was finer soil and it turned to a temporary liquid state... this is called *liquefaction*". The

topology of the ground, the physical landscape, like the topology of the human psyche: this is the interesting parallel put into view by *Carrizo-Parkfield Diaries*, that's why we cited Dostoevski in the title. He has investigated the neurotic landscape of the human mind, here the narrative is ultimately authored by the earth itself, with its untiring seismic activity.

**Christina MCPhee** is a new media artist. She studied literature and history of art at Scripps College, Claremont and painting at the Kansas City Art Institute and at Boston University. Her work involves memory and time in complex electronic landscapes, and has been shown all over the world.

**Jeremy Hight** is an artist, writer and poet, he has created various multimedia works, one of the last is 34 North 118 West, a project that uses GPS technology in order to create a narrative formed by the ground, unseen history and people's live movement. His essay entitled *Narrative Archaeology* is studied in universities worldwide. He teaches Visual Communication for Multimedia at Mission College, Los Angeles, and has Neapolitan origins.

**Sinthea (Sindee) Nakatani** is a code programmer that, like she says, has learned much of her coding knowledge from online communities and open source resources. She programmed the *Carrizo-Parkfield Diaries* following, after several options, the KISS (keep it simple stupid) approach, using PHP, MySQL and Actionscript.

[www.carrizoparkfielddiaries.net](http://www.carrizoparkfielddiaries.net)  
[www.christinamcphnee.net](http://www.christinamcphnee.net)  
[www.34n118w.net/](http://www.34n118w.net/)