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# 1 Spectral matching in time domain: a seismological and engineering 2 analysis.

3 Maria Lancieri, Paolo Bazzurro and Oona Scotti

## 4 ABSTRACT

5 The time domain spectral matching is the most commonly used technique in earthquake engineering  
6 to obtain accelerograms whose response spectrum is compatible with a smooth target spectrum, be  
7 it a poly-line design spectrum or a hazard spectrum. These accelerograms are used for assessing the  
8 response of structures, usually beyond their linear elastic regime. Although this practice is  
9 widespread, there is an ongoing debate on whether these matched accelerograms are legitimate  
10 substitutes for real ones and on whether they produce biased structural response estimates.

11 To help shed some light on this debate, we addressed two main questions:

- 12 1. How does the matching process modify the time-frequency properties of a real  
13 accelerogram?
- 14 2. How can one devise a rigorous benchmark to test the performances of spectral matched  
15 accelerograms?

16 We implemented a non-conventional strategy using the jagged spectra of real accelerograms for a  
17 given earthquake scenario as targets. This allows establishing a benchmark by which both  
18 seismological and engineering points of view can be addressed. Given the non-stationarity of the  
19 accelerometric signals, we used the time-frequency Stockwell transform to compare pairs of  
20 accelerograms to characterize in both time and frequency the changes induced by the matching  
21 process and to investigate the characteristics of an accelerogram causing the peaks of the response  
22 of a nonlinear single degree of freedom oscillator.

23 On the seismological side, we found that the spectral matching generates spectrum-compatible  
24 accelerograms with the same dominant frequency of the S-waves of the target and that the matched  
25 accelerograms have, on average, higher coda amplitudes with respect to the natural records with the  
26 same spectrum, over a time window of 5 s.

27 On the engineering side, the most important finding regards the large dispersion of peak responses  
28 to accelerograms with the same spectrum. Caution should therefore be applied in using very few  
29 spectrum-compatible records for practical applications.

## 30 [Introduction](#)

31 The development and refinement of spectrum compatible accelerogram generation techniques has  
32 been the object of many discussions, as four decades of bibliographic evidence on the topic attests  
33 (Rizzo et al., 1975, Kaul 1978, Silva and Lee, 1987, Preumont 1984, Lilhanand and Tseng 1988,  
34 Abrahamson 1992, Mukherjee and Gupta 2002, Suarez and Montejo 2007, Hancock et al. 2006,  
35 Pousse et al. 2006, Al Atik and Abrahamson 2010, Laurendeau et al. 2012, Zentner 2013,  
36 Alexander and al. 2014, Adekristi and Eatherton 2016, among many others).

37 Historically, the concept of response spectrum was formulated in the early 1930s (Biot 1932,  
38 Benioff 1934); the basic idea was that seismic ground acceleration is made up of “exceedingly  
39 variable oscillatory movements” and, in order to reduce such variability, the authors suggested  
40 defining a spectrum to describe the maximum response of pendula, or single-degree-of-freedom  
41 linear oscillators. By design, the response spectrum gives information on the maximum ground  
42 motion amplitude at any given frequency, in terms of acceleration, velocity or displacement, but  
43 ignores the phases. In the following years, its definition was refined (Housner 1941, Hudson 1956)  
44 and it became the standard tool for analyzing the strong motion records properties in relation to the  
45 structural behavior of simple linear oscillators that are of particular interest in modal analysis  
46 (Housner and al. 1953, Alford et al. 1953, Hudson 1962). In the 1970s, the time history analysis of  
47 equipment and structural components was increasingly put into practice in the design of nuclear

48 power plants. As a consequence, the development of accelerograms compatible with smoothed  
49 response design spectra became a necessity. The generation of spectrum-compatible accelerograms  
50 is not a trivial task since the response spectrum, unlike the Fourier spectrum, is not a transform. The  
51 implication of this is that for any given accelerogram, while it is always possible to compute its  
52 response spectrum, there is an infinite number of accelerograms with which it is compatible. Since  
53 the concept of an “inverse response spectrum” is meaningless, researchers have developed many  
54 different methods to generate spectrum compatible accelerograms. They range from pure synthetic  
55 accelerograms that are given by the superposition of sinusoids with a random phase (Gasparini and  
56 Vanmarcke, 1976), to the modification of recorded accelerograms via spectral matching techniques.  
57 Spectral matching techniques are based on the idea of modulating the energy content of a recorded  
58 ground motion so that its response spectrum matches a target. Conceptually, there are two main  
59 strategies to accomplish this. The first is based on the modification of the signal in the frequency  
60 domain (Preumont 1984, Silva and Lee, 1987) by adjusting the Fourier spectrum as a function of  
61 the ratio between original and target spectra. This strategy is quite intuitive, but it is equivalent to  
62 repeatedly superimposing the original accelerogram harmonic motions with uniform amplitude over  
63 the entire time window (Lilhand and Tseng 1988). Thus, in general, this method provides  
64 unrealistic waveforms because it preserves neither the causality nor the non-stationary behavior of  
65 the original seismic signals. The second strategy consists of modifying the original accelerogram in  
66 the time domain by adding wavelets (Kaul 1978, Lilhand and Tseng 1988, Abrahamson 1992, Al  
67 Atik and Abrahamson 2010) until the desired response spectrum is obtained. This time-domain  
68 spectral matching technique assumes that the peak response of a single-degree-of-freedom (SDOF)  
69 oscillator of a given frequency that occurs at a specific time  $t_{max}$  is mostly sensitive to the  
70 accelerogram in the neighborhood of  $t_{max}$ . Therefore, the original accelerogram (commonly called  
71 seed accelerogram) is modified by superimposing wavelet functions, each centered at  $t_{max}$ , whose  
72 amplitude and phase are designed to manipulate the SDOF oscillator response precisely at  $t_{max}$  in  
73 such a way that the discrepancy of the oscillator response to the amplitude of the target spectrum at

74 that frequency is kept within a pre-specified tolerance. Each wavelet whose duration depends on its  
75 frequency produces localized perturbations in the accelerogram. The advantage of working in the  
76 time domain is that the non-stationary behavior of the accelerogram is retained. In addition, the  
77 wavelet function proposed by Al Atik and Abrahamson (2010), unlike the Lilhand and Tseng  
78 (1988) original version, generates velocity and displacement time histories that have no low-  
79 frequency bias. For these reasons, the time-domain spectral matching technique is widely used  
80 because it provides, quickly and easily, more “realistic” non-stationary accelerograms. The  
81 interested reader can find a more detailed discussion on the time-domain matching technique in the  
82 relevant literature (Hancock et al. 2006; Seifried 2013).

83 The end users of these waveforms, namely engineers, use matched accelerograms for assessing  
84 structural response during specific applications but, in general, they trust the work done by the  
85 seismologist and do not question their legitimacy. To engineers, the sanity check that matched  
86 accelerograms must pass to be legitimate is confined to the response they cause to the structures of  
87 interest. If matched accelerograms produce unbiased structural responses when compared to those  
88 of “equivalent” real records, engineers fully embrace them. The acceptance of matched records is  
89 driven by practicality since their use dramatically decreases the number of response analyses  
90 necessary to estimate structural responses within a given level of accuracy. However, if the  
91 response of such records is biased, engineers may still use them for the reasons stated above, but  
92 they may have to statistically correct the responses for the induced level of bias.

93 The presence of bias in structural response has been a matter of debate for almost two decades. On  
94 one hand, some authors (Carballo and Cornell, 2000; Bazzurro and Luco, 2006; Schwab and  
95 Lestuzzi 2007; Huang et al., 2008) identified a systematic bias in the estimation of mean nonlinear  
96 structural response induced by matched records. This is especially true for highly non-linear  
97 structural responses. On the other hand, other studies (Shome et al., 1998, Hancock et al., 2008;  
98 Iervolino et al. 2010; Heo et al., 2010) claim that structural response caused by matched

99 accelerograms has no (or negligible) bias.

100 Answering the “bias issue” is not trivial since many factors come into play, namely the degree of  
101 non-linearity of the structure, the matching strategy, the use of fully synthetic accelerograms, and  
102 the amount of modification caused to their original intensity measures (IMs) by the spectral  
103 matching if recorded data are used as seeds. Supporters of the spectral matching (Watson-Lamprey  
104 and Abrahamson, 2006; Hancock et al., 2008; Grant, and Diaferia, 2013) argue that if the matched  
105 signals are characterized by IMs that are similar to that of the real accelerogram used as seed  
106 (typically Arias Intensity, duration, and so on), then matched accelerograms do not bias the  
107 structural response. Implicit in this reasoning is the assumption that only a naïve application of the  
108 matching procedure produces records that may induce bias in structural response. Iervolino and  
109 coauthors (2010) raised a central point to this debate around biased response. One must then  
110 question whether using the response of real records as a benchmark to validate the performance of  
111 matched accelerograms as done in many studies is appropriate. Indeed, assessing the “equivalence”  
112 between the matched and real records is not straightforward. The degree of statistical equivalence of  
113 the response is often based on few proxies that do not reveal the whole complexity of a seismic  
114 signal, a complexity that could have an impact on the non-linear behavior of a structure that  
115 experiences it.

116 Matched accelerograms are only used for engineering purposes, and their seismological features  
117 have never been thoroughly investigated. Of course, the matched accelerograms are characterized  
118 by smooth spectra whereas recorded time histories have spectra whose jaggedness is related to the  
119 complexity of the source process, wave propagation in crustal medium and the response of the  
120 shallower soil layers beneath the seismic station. From a seismological viewpoint, however, despite  
121 the “quasi-empiric” appellative given by Silva and Lee (1987), the nature and the characteristics of  
122 matched accelerograms compared to those of real ones are in fact barely known.

123 In this paper, we propose an unconventional strategy to create a set of matched waveforms with the  
124 two-fold objective of understanding their features vis-à-vis those of real records and, to a limited  
125 extent, of testing whether these records produce an unbiased structural response, and if so, why.  
126 Instead of matching the spectra of real records to a target smooth spectrum, as routinely done, we  
127 matched them to jagged target spectra of real records. The advantage of this strategy is that each  
128 target spectrum corresponds to its natural accelerogram. This correspondence allows establishing a  
129 real benchmark to which both seismological and engineering point of views can be considered.  
130 More specifically, wearing a seismological hat, we will make a direct investigation of many  
131 accelerograms matched to the same jagged spectrum. Our goal is to assess and characterize the  
132 common features, if any, shared by original and matched accelerograms. With this aim we propose  
133 an original method, based on the Stockwell transform (Stockwell et al. 1996) that allows comparing  
134 two non-stationary accelerograms and, thus allows one to understand how the accelerogram is  
135 modified by each step of the iterative matching procedure.  
136 Wearing an engineering hat, we instead quantify the differences between the values of a set of  
137 standard Intensity Measures (IMs) of the target and matched accelerograms. Finally, we go beyond  
138 linear SDOF responses and start to address the engineering concerns by comparing the response and  
139 respective damage states caused by original and matched time histories of a nonlinear SDOF  
140 oscillator. Using a small subset of accelerograms with the same response spectrum, we use the  
141 Stockwell transform to qualitatively identify the accelerogram's features that cause different  
142 structural responses.

### 143 [The Jagged Spectrum Matching Process](#)

#### 144 [Database](#)

145 The first step is the selection of a sufficient number of accelerograms to allow a robust statistical  
146 inference. Selecting many records from past earthquakes from a large magnitude,  $M$ , and source-  
147 site distance,  $R$ , bin would unnecessarily complicate the analysis since the accelerograms would be

148 too different in terms of both amplitude and duration. Therefore, we chose a narrow, well-populated  
149 M-R bin with moment magnitude ranging from 5.8 to 6.6 and hypocentral distance from 10 to 30  
150 km (Figure 1a). In total, we extracted 226 “raw”, uncorrected accelerograms from the Southern  
151 California Earthquakes, the Euro-Mediterranean (Ambraseys et al. 2004) and Orfeus databases. The  
152 M-R scattergram and histogram of the selected suite of records is plotted in Figure 1a. We then  
153 applied a baseline correction (based on Paolucci et al. 2011) to each accelerogram in order to  
154 remove any residual displacement after a double integration of the accelerometric signal.

### 155 [Tuning RSPMatch](#)

156 In this paper, we use the RSPMatch code (Al Atik and Abrahamson 2010), the most commonly  
157 used code for signal matching in the time domain. The spectra are matched in the frequency range  
158 0.1 – 35 Hz. The matching procedure here is performed in 4 passes, each of which modifies the  
159 accelerogram progressively over 4 frequency ranges: [1-35] Hz, [0.5-35] Hz, [0.3 - 35] Hz, and  
160 [0.1-35] Hz. Concerning the matching procedure, as alluded to in the introduction, we used each  
161 one of the 226 response spectra as a target for the matching while utilizing the remaining 225  
162 accelerograms as seeds for the matching (Figure 1b). For the sake of conciseness, in the following  
163 we will refer to the real accelerogram corresponding to the target spectrum as the “target  
164 accelerogram”. This exercise is repeated for all 226 records in the bin, hence generating 226  
165 “matched families” for a total of 50858 matched accelerograms. Therefore, each one of the 226  
166 families of records has one real accelerogram and 225 spectrum matched time histories, all of which  
167 have the same response spectrum within a given tolerance.

168 The used wavelet is the “improved tapered cosine” introduced by Al Atik and Abrahamson (2010).

169 The value of the tolerance parameter is set by the user as a function of the desired degree of  
170 similarity between the target and the matched spectrum. The value of the tolerance parameter and  
171 the number of iterations, which influence the convergence time of each RSPMatch run, were  
172 selected after performing a battery of preliminary tests done on 10 target spectra. This exercise

173 resulted in setting a 15% tolerance and 20 iterations as a good compromise between accuracy and  
174 practicality.

175 A final comment on the RSPMatch matching criteria adopted in this study concerns the tuning of  
176 the convergence damping parameter that specifies the fraction of adjustment made to the  
177 acceleration time series at each iteration (for details, see Al Atik and Abrahamson 2010). In  
178 standard applications, where the seed is matched to a smooth target spectrum, the matching process  
179 is parameterized to minimize the differences between the seed and the matched records (looking at  
180 values of quantities, such as Arias intensity and duration) (Grant and Diaferia 2013, Seifried and  
181 Baker 2016). With this aim, some authors explicitly tune the convergence damping parameter to 0.7  
182 or even to lower values (Seifried 2013). In our non-canonical application, we are not interested in  
183 keeping the similarities between the seed and the matched accelerograms. We are rather interested  
184 in obtaining matched and target spectra (and possibly time histories) that are as close as possible.  
185 For this reason, during the matching exercise, we used the default value of 1 for the convergence  
186 damping parameter.

### 187 [Qualifying the matched spectra](#)

188 Since RSPMatch so far is often used by engineers to match smoothed spectra, before pursuing our  
189 study we need to investigate whether it works as intended for matching jagged spectra as well.

190 The successful matching criterion used by the RSPMatch code is based on whether at each  
191 frequency the maximum absolute distance between the ordinates of the target and matched spectra  
192 is within the set tolerance. The code performs a discrepancy check on a frequency-by-frequency  
193 basis, and if the maximum discrepancy value at anyone frequency is greater than the tolerance set  
194 by the user, the matching is declared unsatisfactory, no matter what frequency or how many  
195 frequencies violated this condition.

196 For example, Figure 1c shows the matched spectra that were labeled as successfully matched by  
197 RSPMatch while Figure 1d displays the spectra labeled as unmatched even though the discrepancy

198 between matched and target spectra are noticeable only at very low and very high frequencies that  
199 are irrelevant for driving the response of most structures.

200 A more comprehensive view of the achieved quality of the matching for all the records as a function  
201 of frequency is given in Figure 2. For each of the 226 matched accelerograms families the median  
202 misfit between the target spectrum and the 225 matched spectra has been computed at each  
203 frequency (169 points logarithmically spaced) in the 0.1-35 Hz range as follow:

204

$$Misfit(f) = \frac{1}{226} \sum_{i=1}^{226} \frac{SA_i^{Matched}(f) - SA_i^{Target}(f)}{SA_i^{Target}(f)}$$

205

206 Positive misfits indicate that target spectra amplitudes are higher than the matched. For each  
207 frequency in the range, Figure 2 shows the number of families with median misfit value expressed  
208 in terms of tolerance percentage. The darker bins mean that more than 209 families have a median  
209 misfit equal to zero, while the light grey means that less than 20 families have a median misfit less  
210 than 10%; it can be seen that for the large majority of accelerogram families the median misfit is  
211 centred on zero, except at higher frequencies ( $f > 25$  Hz) where there is a mild median negative bias  
212 of about 2%.

213 From an inspection of Figures 2 we can conclude that all the families of matched records have a  
214 median misfit lower than 10% and that spectra of families of matched records are tightly packed  
215 around the target value at each frequency. Very few exceptions are observed at the very low and  
216 very high frequencies that are inconsequential for the response of most structures. Therefore, we  
217 assume that all the accelerograms are successfully matched for the purposes of this work.

218

## 219 Time-Frequency Analysis of Time Histories Matched to Jagged Spectra

### 220 Comparison of two non-stationary time histories

221 The response spectrum does not reflect the complexity of accelerograms. As stated in the  
222 introduction, even if the matched accelerograms have the same response spectrum of the target, the  
223 accelerograms themselves are different. In this section, we propose a pure seismological method to  
224 assess the differences and/or the similarities between two accelerograms sharing the same spectrum.

225 For stationary time histories, their comparison is easily carried out by performing time cross-  
226 correlation or the spectral correlation expressed as the ratio between the squared cross-spectral  
227 density, and the product of the auto spectral density of the two signals (Norton and Karczub, 2003).

228 Seismic signals, however, are not stationary, and for this reason the comparison needs to be  
229 performed in the time-frequency domain. The Stockwell-Transform (Stockwell et al. 1996), which  
230 is called here *S*-transform for short, is thus a well-suited tool as it provides a time-frequency  
231 representation of the signal. The *S*-transform can be interpreted as an extension of the continuous  
232 wavelet transform with Gaussian windowing, as the mother wavelet with a non-null average, and  
233 dilation factor equal to the inverse of the frequency (Simon et al. 2007, Ventosa et al. 2008). The *S*-  
234 transform,  $S(t, f)$ , is defined as:

$$S(\tau, f) = \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} h(t) \frac{|f|}{\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{(\tau-t)^2 f^2}{2}} e^{-i2\pi f t} dt$$

235 Where  $h(t)$  is the time-series (namely, the accelerogram in this application),  $f$  the frequency and  $t$   
236 the time. The integral of the *S*-transform along the time axis is simply the Fourier transform of the  
237 time-series  $h(t)$ , and therefore  $S(t, f)$  can be interpreted as a power density spectrum unrolled along  
238 the time axis.

239 By definition, the *S*-transform gives the Fourier spectra computed on Gaussian windows centered at  
240 each time sample and, therefore, the spectral correlation can then be obtained by looking at the  
241 coherence of the *S*-transforms along the time axis. Such a strategy is inspired by the advanced

242 signal comparison techniques based on local cross-correlation that are mainly used in the domain of  
 243 full wave tomography (Hale 2006).

244 In mathematical terms, the forward 1-Dimensional coherence (1DCoh) product of the  $S$ -transforms  
 245 is expressed as:

$$\forall \Delta t \in \left[0, \frac{t_{max}}{\Delta t}\right]$$

$$1DCoh = S_{Match}(t, f) \times S_{Target}(t + \Delta t, f) / \max |S_{Match}(t, f) \times S_{Target}(t + \Delta t, f)|$$

246 while

$$\forall \Delta t \in \left[0, \frac{t_{max}}{\Delta t}\right]$$

$$1DCoh = S_{Match}(t + \Delta t, f) \times S_{Target}(t, f) / \max |S_{Match}(t + \Delta t, f) \times S_{Target}(t, f)|$$

247 is the backward 1-dimensional coherence image; where  $S_{Match}$  and  $S_{Target}$  are the  $S$ -transforms of the  
 248 matched accelerograms. The  $S$ -transform product is computed in the complex domain.  
 249 Theoretically,  $\Delta t$  should be the sampling interval of the accelerogram, which here is 0.005 s, but in  
 250 practice, this short  $\Delta t$  would make the calculation too long. For this reason, we set  $\Delta t$  has equal to  
 251 0.2 s. The result of the coherence analysis is a time-frequency coherence image obtained plotting  
 252 the absolute value of the  $S$ -transform product. A coherence score is attributed as a function of the  
 253 maximum reached by the absolute value of the coherence product.

254 An example is given in Figure 3 where the “target” (Figure 3a) and the matched (Figure 3b)  
 255 accelerograms are plotted along with their  $S$ -transforms (Figure 3c, Figure 3d), the coherence image  
 256 is given in Figure 3e. The areas of the  $S$ -transforms in darker tones have higher amplitudes and can  
 257 be interpreted as amplitude bursts. The target and the matched accelerograms are both characterized  
 258 by the presence of an amplitude burst occurring at around 5 s and centered at 2.7 Hz, which is a  
 259 feature that the  $S$ -transform coherence clearly highlights. However, the matched accelerogram  
 260 differs from the target one mostly because of a longer coda characterized by 3 amplitude bursts

261 centered at around 3 Hz. We also remark the presence darker stripes located in the 5 – 10 s time  
262 window and spanning a large frequency range up to 25 Hz.

263 Looking at this example we can claim that in this case, the matching process generates an  
264 accelerogram having an amplitude burst centered on the same frequency of the amplitude burst of  
265 the target accelerogram. In other words, in this particular case, the S-waves (S is for secondary) of  
266 the matched and the target accelerograms have both the same dominant frequency. However, note  
267 that in this example the codas of matched accelerograms have a longer duration and higher  
268 amplitude compared to the coda of the target accelerogram.

269 The question now is to understand how general these two observations are.

#### 270 [Analysis of time histories matched to the same jagged spectrum](#)

271 To give an exhaustive answer to this question we should perform the same analysis for all the  
272 50850 waveforms but this exercise is not feasible since the S-transform coherence analysis is time  
273 consuming. Hence, we limited the analysis to a subset of five families of matched accelerograms  
274 (limiting the number of analysis to 1125 S-transform coherence analysis) chosen to be different  
275 from one another. The five families were selected on the basis of the characteristics of the “target”  
276 accelerograms, namely different S-wave dominant frequencies, different S-transform shapes (a  
277 single burst, multiple bursts), and different Husid duration. The S-wave dominant frequencies of the  
278 target histories are 1.50, 3.53, 5.64, 5.95, and 9.0 Hz; they correspond to the values where the  
279 maxima of the S-transform amplitudes are located.

280 To answer whether the dominant frequency of seed and target accelerograms is about the same in  
281 all cases in Figure 4 we plot the distribution of the frequencies where the coherence between the  
282 target and the matched accelerograms S-transform reach its maximum. In all the examined cases,  
283 indeed the maxima of coherence images are centered at the dominant frequency of the target S-  
284 wave and the coherence scores are always larger than 0.75. Moreover, this observation is  
285 independent of the coherence score. This test shows that the matching process shifts the S-wave

286 dominant frequency of the seed accelerogram in the same neighborhood of the S-wave dominant  
287 frequency of the target accelerogram. In other words, a process driven by the response spectrum  
288 induces some similarity in the Fourier spectra (recall that the S-transform is a Fourier transform  
289 unwrapped along the time axis) of the matched and the target waveforms. Therefore, even if the  
290 matched accelerograms differ from one another, they show common features related to the Fourier  
291 spectral content of the target.

292 We can conclude that, at least for this earthquake scenario and for this subset of 1125 waveforms,  
293 the S-waves of the matched and target accelerograms have approximately the same dominant  
294 frequency.

295 The second question was: “do the matched accelerograms have longer coda compared to the target  
296 ones in all cases?” To answer this, we compared the target matched accelerogram codas by  
297 calculating the ratio of accelerogram envelope.

298 The performed analysis is based on the following steps:

- 299 1. We manually picked the instant,  $t_{\text{coda}}$ , corresponding to the beginning of the coda of  
300 each target/seed accelerogram pair (an example is shown in Figure 5a);
- 301 2. We compute the envelope of the target and all the matched waveforms defined as the  
302 amplitude of the Hilbert transform of the accelerogram (Figure 5b, the envelope of the  
303 matched accelerograms are plotted as density of points);
- 304 3. We assume that the matching process does not change the value of the  $t_{\text{coda}}$  and,  
305 therefore, the  $t_{\text{coda}}$  of the seed accelerogram is attributed to the matched waveform;
- 306 4. We align the target and the matched accelerogram at the manually picked  $t_{\text{coda}}$   
307 values;
- 308 5. For each target-matched accelerogram pair, we compute the average coda envelope  
309 ratio ( $ER$ ) over 1 second non-overlapping time-windows. This operation both allows

310 smoothing the ratio value and also reduces the impact of the possible  $t_{\text{coda}}$  picking errors  
311 (Figure 5-c). The quantity  $ER$  is defined as following:

$$ER = \int_T^{T+1} \frac{|\mathcal{H}(m(t))|}{|\mathcal{H}(T(t))|} dt$$

312 where  $|\mathcal{H}(m(t))|$  is the amplitude of the Hilbert transform of the matched accelerogram  
313 and  $|\mathcal{H}(T(t))|$  is the amplitude of the Hilbert transform of the target accelerogram

314 6. We repeat the same operation for all the matched families. We set to zero the  $t_{\text{coda}}$ ,  
315 and we plot as density of points the  $ER$  values computed in six time windows following the  
316  $t_{\text{coda}}$  (Figure 5d).

317 To enhance the coda amplitude amplification/reduction, the  $ER$  distribution in Figure 5d is plotted  
318 on a logarithmic base 2 scale. We remark that, in all the six time windows, the  $ER$  values are greater  
319 than 1 (0 in  $\log_2$  scale) for the large majority of data, indicating that the coda amplitude is usually  
320 (but not always) amplified. In particular, the  $ER$  distributions are centered at two (1 in  $\log_2$  scale) in  
321 the first three seconds after  $t_{\text{coda}}$  indicating that, on average, the coda amplitude of the matched  
322 accelerograms is twice that of the target waveforms. In the following time windows, the  $ER$   
323 distributions are more scattered and the average ratio is close to 1.4 (0.5 in  $\log_2$  scale).

324 This result can be interpreted in two different ways: matched accelerograms usually have higher  
325 coda amplitudes than the target accelerograms or, matched accelerograms usually have longer  
326 strong-phase duration than the target accelerograms. As will be shown in Section “*Statistical*  
327 *Analysis of Time Histories Matched to Jagged Spectra: Intensity Measures*”, the analysis of the  
328 Husid duration leans towards this latter interpretation.

### 329 [Analysis of the matching process using S-transform](#)

330 In this subsection, we address the question of the origin of the similarities and differences present in  
331 target and matched time histories. As an illustrative example, we thus examine here the different

332 iterations of the RSPMatch matching process for the same accelerogram pairs considered in Figure  
333 3.

334 Before delving into the details of the matching iterative process, it is worth recalling that:

335 - the response spectrum is defined as the peak response to the accelerogram of a series  
336 of linear elastic single-degree-of-freedom (SDOF) harmonic oscillators, each characterized  
337 by a fundamental frequency and damping (often 5% of critical);

338 - the “time domain” matching method assumes that the time at which the SDOF  
339 oscillator peak response occurs (hereinafter TPR) does not change as a consequence of the  
340 iterative wavelet adjustment;

341 - RSPMatch modifies the seed accelerograms superimposing wavelet functions  
342 centered at TPR, whose amplitude and phase are designed to manipulate the SDOF  
343 oscillator response.

344 - The time-frequency content of the cosine wavelets (We show the improved tapered  
345 cosine used by RSPMatch in the supplementary material) is a direct consequence of the  
346 Gabor's principle, asserting that the spreads in the time and frequency measurements must  
347 define a rectangle in Fourier space whose area is at least 1. If the wavelet has a long duration  
348 the spread will be higher in time domain (this is the case of the 2 Hz wavelet in the top right  
349 panel in SM), while if the wavelet has a short duration the spread will be higher in the  
350 frequency domain (this is the case of the 20 Hz wavelet in the bottom right panel in SM).

351 The spectral matching process is presented in Figure 6 where we look simultaneously at the  
352 response spectra adjustment (Figure 6a), the corresponding S transform modification (Figure 6b),  
353 and the accelerogram evolution (Figure 6c). Figure 6a displays the target, seed and matched spectra.

354 The matching procedure here is performed in 4 passes, each of which modifies the accelerogram  
355 progressively over 4 frequency ranges: [1-35] Hz, [0.5-35] Hz, [0.3 - 35] Hz, and [0.1-35] Hz (a1-  
356 a4). Looking at Figure 6a (top panel), the spectrum of the seed is below the target up to 4 Hz, at

357 higher frequencies the target and the seed spectra have comparable amplitudes. Note that for passes  
358 2,3 and 4 the updated input seed spectrum is the response spectrum of the accelerograms obtained  
359 as the output from the previous pass.

360 As far as the S-transform features, for both target and seed the highest amplitude bursts visible on  
361 the S-transform (Figure 6b) correspond to the S-waves on the time histories (Figure 6c), as already  
362 shown in Figure 3. The S-wave dominant frequencies (the center of the amplitude burst) are located  
363 between 5-10 s and centered on 2.7 Hz for the target and between 3 and 7 s and centered around 4  
364 Hz for the seed. The TPR values are plotted with empty circles as a function of the fundamental  
365 frequency of the corresponding SDOF (Figure 6b). We remark that many TPR values are around  
366 the time of the amplitude burst corresponding to the S-waves. This observation is valid for the 225  
367 time histories. Therefore, for the investigated scenario, the response spectrum is controlled by the S  
368 wave amplitudes in a frequency range of 2 – 8 Hz. After the first pass (Figure 6b) the wavelets  
369 passing through the TPR lying on the S-phase seed shift the amplitude burst center from 4 to 2.7  
370 Hz, closer to the target dominant frequency. In particular, we remark that the TPR located between  
371 3 and 7 s, are now more spread in time. This step is at the origin of the similarity highlighted in  
372 Figure 3 and Figure 4.

373 At lower frequencies ( $< 1$  Hz), the response spectrum amplitude is controlled by the coda of the  
374 accelerograms for both target and seed cases, as shown by the location of TPR values. During the  
375 first pass of the matching a lower frequency coda appears (indicated by the black arrows on Figure  
376 6b and Figure 6c), having generally higher amplitudes than the seed. The coda amplitude and  
377 shapes are adjusted in the subsequent passes, as apparent by inspecting the corresponding  
378 accelerograms (Figure 6c).

379 The low-frequency content is adjusted by the RSPMatch code with the insertion of many low-  
380 frequency cosine wavelets (characterized by a longer duration and a spread along the time axis of  
381 the S-transform,) in the coda of the accelerogram. The consequence of such an adjustment is that

382 the coda amplitude of the matched record is higher than the seed, over a time window of 5 s (Figure  
383 6c). A systematic analysis of the seed coda amplification induced by the spectral matching process  
384 (see Appendix C) shows that, in general, this trend takes place over an average time window of 3  
385 seconds.

386 Concerning the frequencies higher than 10 Hz, we observe that the TPR values of the seed  
387 accelerogram of all the SDOFs with fundamental frequency greater than 7 Hz (with the exception of  
388 10 Hz) are aligned at 4.8 s (Figure 6b). This implies that, during the matching process, many high-  
389 frequency wavelets are injected at the same instant. The amplitude of such wavelets is relatively  
390 small since the target and seed spectra are close. Nevertheless their superposition originates the  
391 high-frequency (above 10Hz) low amplitude stripes visible on the matched accelerogram.

392 Thanks to the S-transform analysis we were able to trace the modification induced on the seed by  
393 the matching process, and to explain the origin of the similarities between matched and target  
394 accelerograms. The question arising now is if and how the changes induced by the spectral  
395 matching process impact the response of structures subject to matched records compared to the  
396 response of natural records with the same target spectrum.

### 397 [Time-Frequency Analysis of the Response of a Nonlinear Spring](#)

398 A comprehensive response to this question can only be given after the analysis of responses of  
399 many structures with different geometries, and material laws have been investigated. In this paper,  
400 we start addressing this question by considering a nonlinear SDOF system with an initial  
401 fundamental frequency of 1 Hz. For this purpose, we selected the “spring 1a” SDOF system in the  
402 FEMA P440A document (Applied Technology Council, 2009), which is intended to model the  
403 behavior of a typical gravity frame system (e. g., steel) commonly found in US buildings. The force-  
404 displacement backbone curve yields at a normalized base shear of 0.25 and a drift of 0.5% and  
405 includes a strength drop at a normalized base shear of 1 and drift of 2.5%. This drop terminates with  
406 a horizontal plateau with a residual strength of 55% of the ultimate capacity starting at a drift of 4%

407 and extending to an ultimate deformation capacity of 7%. Figure 7 shows the backbone capacity  
408 curve of the spring with its degrading hysteric behavior obtained by subjecting it to the 1 Hz  
409 sinusoidal acceleration time history with increasing amplitude shown at the top of the figure. The  
410 spring response is characterized by cyclic strength and stiffness degradation.

411 We analyze now the spring response and its relationship with the input accelerogram using the S-  
412 transform technique. An example is given in Figure 8 where one of the 226 real accelerograms used  
413 as input is represented by its response spectrum, its accelerogram and the corresponding S-  
414 transform (with a zoom between 0 and 1 Hz). The accelerogram's features are visually compared  
415 with the time history of spring drift,  $\Theta$ , along with its S-transform and the response hysteretic  
416 behavior expressed in terms of normalized base shear versus drift.

417 The spring reaches the max of 4% drift at around 7 s (vertical lines on the subplot), when an  
418 energetic pulse centered at 1 Hz occurs in the accelerogram as clearly visible in the S-transform.  
419 The spring oscillates around its linear fundamental frequency of 1 Hz up to this burst of amplitude.  
420 After this instant, the spring enters the nonlinear response regime and its oscillation frequency shifts  
421 to 0.4 Hz because of the stiffness degradation observed in the hysteretic curve.

422 In Figure 9 we move a step forward in our analysis by considering two additional accelerograms  
423 this time matched to the response spectrum of the accelerogram shown in Figure 8. The two  
424 matched accelerograms have different duration, different number of amplitude bursts arriving at  
425 different times (cf. Figure 9e and Figure 9f).

426 Although they have essentially the same response spectra, matched accelerograms induce very  
427 different SDOF responses (cf. Figure 9i, 9k, 9m and Figure 9j, 9l, 9n). In the case of the first  
428 matched accelerogram, the spring responds similarly to the target accelerograms (Figure 9m). At  
429 the occurrence of the amplitude pulse at 1 Hz the spring reaches the maximum drift (of about 6%)  
430 (Figure 9i) and immediately after its dominant oscillator frequency decreases to 0.4 Hz (Figure 9k).  
431 The response to the second matched accelerogram, however, shows a different, more intriguing

432 behavior (Figure 9j, 9l, 9n). The spring responds to the first amplitude pulse visible in the  
433 accelerogram S-transform at around 7 s (dashed line in Figure 9j  
434 ) and reaches a drift higher than the 2.5% at which the ultimate base shear of the spring is attained  
435 in the capacity curve. Then a second pulse of higher amplitudes occurs at 12 s; the spring response  
436 reaches 4% drift, its strength is reduced to 55% (Figure 7) of its base shear capacity and its  
437 fundamental frequency drops from 1 Hz to 0.4 Hz. Finally, a third small pulse centered at 0.4 Hz  
438 occurs at 16 s and, although its amplitude is not large it is sufficient to lead the structure to its  
439 ultimate 7% drift capacity.

440 From this example, we learn that the two matched accelerograms are both different than the target.  
441 But for the first accelerogram, these differences do not radically change the SDOF response,  
442 whereas the second accelerogram shows a more aggressive behavior. The level of aggressiveness of  
443 matched accelerograms is not easily generalizable. In Appendix C we present an example of two  
444 accelerograms matched to another target spectrum where one of the accelerograms is less  
445 aggressive than the target.

446 Of course, these considerations apply to the response of this specific SDOF spring whose force-  
447 deformation backbone curve is characterized by an abrupt strength drop after the yielding.

448 The most interesting result is that time histories that are matched to the same spectrum (in this case  
449 the jagged one of a real record) can cause widely different responses to the same structure. This  
450 result suggests caution in selecting only a few matched records to test the fitness for purposes of an  
451 existing structure or of a newly designed one. Also, and perhaps even more importantly, with the  
452 knowledge of the nonlinear behavior of the structure that the matched time histories are intended to  
453 test, the seismologist could, using the S-transform technique adopted here, easily identify and  
454 cherry pick accelerograms that are either benign or aggressive *for that specific structure*. The  
455 spectral analysis findings discussed here could be used judiciously to help selecting a pool of  
456 records that are consistent with the target but are statistically balanced between aggressive and

457 benign behavior for the structure at hand. This arbitrariness, however, could potentially be misused,  
458 if so desired.

#### 459 [Statistical Analysis of Time Histories Matched to Jagged Spectra: Intensity Measures](#)

460 The S-transform analysis presented in the previous paragraphs is a useful tool to look in detail at the  
461 characteristics of both the accelerograms and of the induced drift. However, this is a time-  
462 consuming procedure not suitable for a comprehensive statistical analysis of the entire data-set. A  
463 simpler way to address the question about the degree of similarity between the matched and the  
464 target accelerograms is to carry out a statistical analysis of the similarity of an ensemble of IMs  
465 whose values are extracted from both the natural target record and from the 225 matched records  
466 for all the 226 permutations. The IMs considered here are:

- 467 1. Peak Ground Acceleration, defined as  $PGA = \max|h(t)|$ , where  $h(t)$  is the ground  
468 acceleration expressed in g;
- 469 2. Arias Intensity (Arias, 1970)  $AI = \frac{\pi}{2} \int_0^T h(t)^2 dt$  where T is the whole ground motion  
470 duration;
- 471 3. Husid duration (defined as the duration time interval between 5%- 95% of AI)  
472 (Husid 1969);
- 473 4. Standardized CAV (EPRI 2006) defined as the integral of the absolute value of the  
474 ground acceleration over non-overlapping time windows of 1s with acceleration greater than  
475 2.5% of g, that is  $SCAV = \sum_{i=0}^N H(h(T_i) - 0.025) \int_{t=T_i}^{t=T_i+1} |h(t)| dt$  where H is the  
476 Heaviside (or unit step) function equal to 0 if  $h(T) < 0.025g$  and to 1 elsewhere;
- 477 5. Housner Intensity  $HI = \int_{0.1s}^{0.5s} PSV(\tau) d\tau$  where PSV is the pseudo spectral velocity  
478 and  $\tau$  is the oscillator period;
- 479 6. Spectral intensity  $SInt = \int_{0.1s}^{2.5s} PSA(\tau) d\tau /$  where PSA is the pseudo spectral  
480 acceleration.

481 For each considered IM, the distribution of IM values computed on the 226 seed ground motions  
482 (real data) is compared separately with each one of the 226 IMs distributions computed using the  
483 matched data. Such a comparison was done for all the 226 matched families, but for the sake of  
484 synthesis Figure 10a displays only 19 distributions randomly selected among the 226 available.  
485 Nevertheless, the trends and the properties shown by this subset are fully representative of those of  
486 all the other families of matched ground motions. The IM distributions are graphically represented  
487 by boxplots, which provide a representation of distribution features such as width, symmetry,  
488 median, and other quantiles. The box limits shown here are the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> quantiles of the  
489 distribution, the whiskers located at the top and bottom of the box span the distribution over 2.7  
490 standard deviations (this range encloses a probability of about 99.3%), and finally the black  
491 horizontal line in the middle of the box is the median value. By comparing the box sizes, it is  
492 possible to conclude that for all the investigated IM that do not explicitly depend on the duration of  
493 the record the variability of the IM is indeed strongly reduced by the spectral matching, as intended.  
494 For example, the PGA values of seed data vary between 0.04 g and 1.6 g (corresponding to -1.4 and  
495 0.2 log<sub>10</sub>(PGA) values in Figure 10a), while the box plots of the 19 matched families are tightly  
496 compressed around their median values, and the boxes are reduced to a line with whiskers, in some  
497 cases only barely visible. As mentioned and as expected, the conclusion above does not hold for the  
498 Husid duration, because the matching does not significantly affect the duration of the seed record  
499 (see Appendix C for a detailed discussion), and only partially holds for AI and SCAV because these  
500 two IMs are dependent, although less directly, on the duration of the record.

501 It is, however, more interesting and instructive to compare the median values of each IM computed  
502 for the matched families with the corresponding value of the target ground motion. This value is  
503 plotted as a dot in Figure 10a, Figure 10e, Figure 10g, Figure 10i, Figure 10k. The median values of  
504 peak ground acceleration (PGA), Housner Intensity and Spectral Intensity of the matched  
505 accelerograms are close to the corresponding values of the target record. Again, this is to be

506 expected since these IMs are directly or indirectly targets for the matching procedure and do not  
507 depend explicitly on the duration of the record.

508 The Husid Duration is the only investigated parameter that after the matching still shows median  
509 values close to the median value computed on the seed ground motions and a certain variability (as  
510 shown by wide boxes Figure 10c). Moreover, the median duration of the matched families differs  
511 from the duration value of the target ground motion (except for few families, as discussed in the  
512 following). All these observations lead to conclude that the Husid Duration is the least modified IM  
513 by the matching process (in this case the coda ratio distributions are mainly centered on 1, recall  
514 Figure C1 in Appendix C)

515 The distributions of Standardized CAV and Arias intensity (Figure 10e and Figure 10g) can be  
516 better interpreted by looking jointly at the PGA and Husid distributions since they are expressed as  
517 the integral over time of quantities derived from the ground motion amplitude (Figure 10a and  
518 Figure 10c). If the median PGA is close to the target value (the box and the dot are close), but the  
519 Husid duration is higher than the target value (the box is above the dot as, e.g., in the first box in  
520 Figure 10a) then Arias and Standardized CAV have median values higher than the “target” value. In  
521 the second highlighted case, the matched ground motions have median PGA and Husid duration  
522 close to the “target” values and both Standardized CAV and Arias intensity distributions have  
523 median values close to the target.

524 Finally, a more comprehensive visualization of the discrepancy between IM values of target and  
525 matched accelerograms is provided in Figure 10b, Figure 10d, Figure 10f, Figure 10h, Figure 10j,  
526 Figure 10l. This figure shows, for all the considered IMs, the distribution of the difference between  
527 the median value computed for each one of the 226 families of matched time histories (namely the  
528 center of the box plot in Figure 10a, Figure 10c, Figure 10e, Figure 10g, Figure 10i, Figure 10k) and  
529 the IM value of the target accelerogram of that family (the dot in Figure 10a, Figure 10c, Figure  
530 10e, Figure 10g, Figure 10i, Figure 10k). The asymmetric tail of the histograms related to Arias

531 intensity, Standardized CAV, and Husid duration clearly shows that the values of these IMs  
532 estimated from the matched records tend to be higher than the values from the target record. The  
533 systematic over-estimation of these IMs is apparently induced by the matching procedure. The PGA  
534 distribution has a short-left tail (Figure 10b), however, the 87% of the differences are within the  
535  $\pm 15\%$  range delimited by the vertical dashed lines, and only the remaining 13% is smaller than -  
536 15%. The differences between the values of Housner and Spectral Intensities of matched and target  
537 accelerograms are instead minimal (Figure 10k, Figure 10l), since these quantities are directly  
538 related to the response spectra matched by the procedure. For these two IMs the histograms of the  
539 differences are plotted here only as sanity checks.

540 The statistical comparisons between the distributions of differences between Intensity Measures  
541 (IMs) of matched and target accelerograms show high similarities for those IMs (e.g., PGA,  
542 Housner Intensity and Spectral Intensity) that are not heavily dependent on duration. On the  
543 contrary, the distributions of Husid Duration, Standardized Cumulative Absolute Velocity (SCAV)  
544 and Arias Intensity (AI) are skewed to the left, implying that these IMs tend to have higher values  
545 for matched than target accelerograms. This result supports the seismological observations on coda  
546 amplification of the matched time-series (Figure 5). We also know that such a coda can determine a  
547 more aggressive (Figure 9n) or more benign (Figure C2n) behavior on a SDOF response, but we did  
548 this exercise on only a few examples so far. In the following, we will perform a systematic  
549 investigation to statistically characterize the behavior of the entire matched accelerograms dataset,  
550 with respect to the studied SDOF response.

### 551 [Statistical Analysis of the Response of a Nonlinear Spring.](#)

552 Taking advantage of a large number of matched waveforms, we compute the distribution of  
553 differences,  $Max \Theta_{Matched} - Max \Theta_{Target}$ , of the spring maximum drift induced by the entire  
554 ensemble of matched accelerograms and that of the target accelerogram (Figure 11a). This  
555 distribution has a median value equal to zero and the interquartile range (IQR defined as  $Q_{84} - Q_{16}$ )

556 is 0.7% wide. This result indicates that, at least for this spring, there is no evidence that the matched  
557 time histories induce structural responses that are either more benign or more aggressive than those  
558 of target accelerograms.

559 However, for a deeper understanding of what makes a matched accelerogram either more  
560 aggressive or more benign for the considered spring we categorized the *target accelerograms* into  
561 four classes based on the severity of their maximum spring responses: *yielding class* (between 0.5%  
562 and 2.5% drift), *strength drop class* (between 2.5% and 4% drift), *plateau class* (between 4% and  
563 7%), and *ultimate class* (equal to 7% drift). (See Figure 7 for the definition of the four response  
564 severity classes).

565 Figure 11 shows the histograms of the drift misfits of time histories matched to target accelerograms  
566 whose responses belong to the yielding class (Panel b), to the strength drop class (Panel c), to the  
567 plateau class (Panel d) and the ultimate/collapse class (Panel e).

568 If the response spectrum matching operation does not introduce biases in this spring's response and  
569 if we assume that the response spectrum is everything that matters for estimating nonlinear  
570 structural response (which, of course, is not entirely true), then the drifts related to the target  
571 accelerograms and the drifts related to the matched accelerograms should belong to the same  
572 response severity class (Table 1). This is the case for the "yielding target accelerograms"  
573 (Figure 11b), in which the median and the average values of the drift misfits are equal to 0 and the  
574 IQR is of the order of 0.4%. All the matched accelerograms induce a response that is below yielding  
575 (see Table 1). This is expected since the spring behaves linearly for all the matched accelerograms  
576 and for linear responses the spectrum is all that matters.

577 A different behavior, however, is observed when the response of the spring enters the nonlinear  
578 regime. For the matched time histories whose target belongs to the strength drop class (Figure 11c),  
579 the median drift difference equals to 0% and the IQR is on the order of 1.4%. Among the matched  
580 time histories, 1088 are associated with a linear behavior (visible as a histogram on the left tail of

581 the distribution), 1558 matched time histories induce a more severe response and drive the spring to  
582 the plateau segment of the capacity curve (see histogram in the right tail), and finally 164 time  
583 histories drive the spring to its ultimate 7% drift (see histogram on the far-right tail).

584 The most scattered distribution of drift difference is the one corresponding to matched  
585 accelerograms whose target accelerograms push the spring into the plateau part of the backbone  
586 curve (Figure11d). This plateau class is composed of 8775 matched waveforms (corresponding to  
587 39 target time histories) with a median difference in spring response equal to -0.4% drift and IQR  
588 on the order of 2.5%. Among the matched waveforms, 18 induce a spring response within the  
589 yielding segment (visible as a histogram on the far-left tail of the distribution), 2455 induce a drift  
590 within the strength drop segment (histogram on the left tail), and 909 lead the spring to its ultimate  
591 drift (see histogram on the right tail). Looking at the overall statistic for the plateau class (Table 1),  
592 almost 40% of the matched accelerograms cause responses that are either less severe (28% in  
593 strength drop and 0.2% even in the linear range) or more severe (10% in ultimate) than that of the  
594 target time histories.

595 Finally, the ultimate/collapse drift class (Figure11e) contains 15300 (corresponding to 68 target  
596 time histories) with an asymmetric distribution characterized by a tall bin centered on zero (the  
597 median is equal to zero and IQR is on the order of 0.1%). The left tail composed of 2366  
598 accelerograms driving the spring within the plateau segment of the capacity curve and 73  
599 accelerograms with drift belonging to the drop strength segment of the capacity curve.

600 In synthesis, from Figure11 we can conclude that:

- 601 1. Two time histories with the same response spectrum can cause completely different  
602 nonlinear responses in the same structure. The distribution of the maximum induced drifts,  
603 which is structure-specific, can be very wide when the target spectrum is high enough that  
604 the matched time histories cause, on average, a maximum response in the nonlinear range.
- 605 2. We observe no distinct bias in the nonlinear response of matched time histories for

606 this spring. Given that this spring has a brittle behavior (essentially a strength reduction  
607 factor,  $R$ , equal to 1.0), this result is consistent with the findings of others (e.g., Bazzurro  
608 and Luco, 2006, Luco and Bazzurro, 2007, Seifried and Baker, 2016) that used, as  
609 conventionally done, a smoothed target spectrum rather than the jagged target spectrum used  
610 in this study.

611 This analysis shows that the benign or aggressive behavior of a matched accelerogram does not  
612 depend only on the features produced by the spectral matching (like the coda amplification or IMs  
613 left tails), but also on the characteristics of the structure that experiences them. This observation  
614 confirms for records matched to jagged spectra the findings in Bazzurro and Luco (2006) that  
615 accelerograms matched to a smoothed spectrum (or any accelerogram, for that matter) cannot be  
616 labeled as "aggressive" or "benign" without considering a particular structural vibration period and  
617 specific yield strength and cyclic behavior of the structure. Of course, this conclusion needs to be  
618 pursued beyond the studied SDOF.

## 619 Conclusions

620 This work represents a first step towards resolving the ongoing debate on whether the matched  
621 accelerograms are legitimate substitutes for real ones and on whether they produce biased structural  
622 response estimates. Presently the debate suffers from the following caveats (i) selected real  
623 accelerograms are used as the seed for the matching, which modifies their seismological  
624 characteristics and thus may systematically change the structural response (i.e., induce bias) (ii)  
625 beyond yielding, the structural response is no longer controlled only by the spectral amplitude of  
626 the input ground motion (see Seifried and Baker 2016 for an in-depth discussion) and (iii) other  
627 quantities that are not explicitly matched by the procedure may have an impact on the response.

628 To overcome such limitations, we established an "unconventional" engineering benchmark,  
629 comparing and contrasting the seismological characteristics of a set of matched and recorded  
630 accelerograms sharing the same real "jagged" response spectrum. The study is based on 226

631 accelerograms, corresponding to a scenario centered on magnitude 6.2 and a source-to-site distance  
632 of 20 km. Iteratively, 225 accelerograms were made spectrum compatible with the response  
633 spectrum of the remaining one using a matching procedure that operates in the time domain. The  
634 226 permutations generated more than 50,000 matched waveforms that constitute the basis for our  
635 statistical study.

636 The seismological conclusions of the papers concern the similarities of matched and real  
637 accelerograms that shared the same target spectrum. To compare two accelerograms we introduced  
638 and employed a new method; that is based on the analysis of the coherence of S-transforms along  
639 the time axis. We found that amplitude bursts injected in the matching procedure control the  
640 spectrum response shape in the 2-10 Hz frequency range, at least for the accelerograms of the  
641 investigated scenario. This suggests that spectral matching generates accelerograms with the same  
642 dominant frequency (in the 2-10 Hz range in our scenario) of the S-waves of the target  
643 accelerograms. However, although the S-waves of target and matched accelerograms have common  
644 features, matched accelerograms show, on average, higher coda amplitudes over a time window of  
645 5 s; this discrepancy can be ascribed to the longer duration of low-frequency wavelets inserted by  
646 the matching procedure. This is also seen in the statistical analysis of the Intensity Measures (IMs),  
647 where the IMs dependent on duration (e.g., Husid duration, SCAV, Arias intensity) show positively  
648 biased central metrics.

649 Moving towards the engineering side of the study we focused our efforts on studying the effects of  
650 spectrum matching on the response of a SDOF oscillator with a brittle nonlinear behavior. We  
651 looked both at the dispersion and at the bias of structural responses to matched records.

652 The most interesting result is that accelerograms matched to the same spectrum can cause structural  
653 responses that are widely different from one another and also widely different than the response of  
654 the real record that shares the same response spectrum. In other words, in a pool of accelerograms  
655 matched to the same spectrum some can cause drifts associated to moderate damage while some can

656 cause drifts associated to collapse. More specifically, based on a few examples, we observed that  
657 matched accelerograms having a longer coda can be either more aggressive or gentler to the specific  
658 SDOF system than the real one. To draw a clear-cut conclusion on the possible response bias of this  
659 SDOF spring, a statistical analysis of the results showed that no appreciable bias in the response of  
660 accelerograms (compared to the case of real records) when matched to the jagged spectra of real  
661 records. These results may not hold for other nonlinear SDOF oscillators but was somewhat  
662 expected for this one since it has a strength reduction factor essentially equal to unity. However,  
663 more investigations using additional nonlinear SDOF and multi-degree-of-freedom structures are  
664 needed to shed more light on the issue of bias possibly induced by spectrum-compatible records  
665 matched to jagged (or smooth) spectra.

666 We believe, however, that some of the results and the tools developed in this study using such an  
667 atypical approach are also applicable to the conventional case of accelerograms matched to  
668 smoothed spectra. In particular using the tools proposed here, a seismologist could identify the  
669 features that make accelerograms compatible to smoothed spectra either benign or aggressive for  
670 the structure of interest. Therefore, given the limitations to using very few matched records in  
671 practical applications, these tools may help seismologists in judiciously choosing an appropriate  
672 balance of benign and aggressive signals for engineering purposes. Hence, we recommend that a  
673 seismologist is first supplied by the engineer, at the bare minimum, with a nonlinear SDOF  
674 representation of the structure so that the record selection is not done blindly. These  
675 recommendations derive naturally from the results of this work but it is our intent to confirm them  
676 by carrying out a specific study based on accelerograms matched to conventional smooth  
677 hazard/design spectra.

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### 683 [Data and Resources](#)

684 The accelerograms used in this paper are issued from the Southern California Earthquakes (CESMD  
685 –strongmotioncenter.org, last visit June 2014), the Euro-Mediterranean (Ambraseys et al. 2004) and  
686 Orfeus (<https://www.orfeus-eu.org/data/strong/> last visit June 2014) databases.

687 The RSPMatch 2009 code has been kindly provided by Linda Al Atik.

688 The structural analysis has been performed using Open System for Earthquake Engineering  
689 Simulation (McKenna et al. 2000). The FEMA P440A single degree of freedom model has been  
690 kindly provided by Dimitrios Vamvatsikos.

691 The figures have been prepared using Matplotlib 2.1.1 (Hunter, 2007)

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TABLE

Table 1: overview of the SDOF responses caused by matched accelerograms.

693

	# Target	#Matched	Yielding	Strength- Drop	Plateau	Ultimate
Yielding	76	17100	17100(100%)			
Strength-Drop	43	9675	1088 (11.2%)	6865(70.9%)	1558(16.2%)	164(1.7%)
Plateau	39	8775	18 (0.2%)	2455 (28%)	5393(61.4%)	909 (10.4%)
Ultimate	68	15300		73(0.5%)	2366(15.5%)	12861(84%)

694

695 *List of Figure Captions*

696 Figure 1 Panel a: Magnitude-Distance scatter plot (grey dots) overlapped with the histogram of the  
697 distance (grey bars). Panel b: 226 response spectra (grey lines), the black dashed line is a randomly  
698 selected spectrum used as “target” for illustrative purposes. Panel (c): response spectra matched  
699 within the 15% tolerance (black lines), the black dashed line the target plotted. Panel (d): response  
700 spectra with a misfit greater than the 15% tolerance.

701 Figure 2: Distribution of the median misfit for each matched family as a function of frequency in  
702 the whole 0.1 -35 Hz range.

703 Figure 3 Target accelerogram (a) and matched time history (b) plotted along with their S-transform  
704 (c and d, respectively). The target and matched S-transforms coherence image as a function of  
705 frequency and time (e) is represented using a sequential palette, with boundaries varying from 0  
706 (clear) to 1 (darker). The white star shows the time-frequency location where the maximum value of  
707 coherence product occurs.

708 Figure 4 Distribution of the frequency where the coherence product between the S-transforms of  
709 matched and target histories reaches the maximum value. The values in the legend indicate the  
710 different maxima values, where 1 stands for high coherence between the S-transforms (as the case  
711 shown in Figure 3) and a value lower than 0.6 stands for a low coherence. The dashed vertical line  
712 indicates the frequency of the maximum S-transform amplitude on the target accelerogram.

713 Figure 5 (a) example of a target accelerogram (black line), the envelope is traced as a continuous  
714 line, the vertical line is the time when the coda starts. b: the envelope of the target accelerogram is  
715 plotted as a solid line, the envelopes of the accelerogram matched to this time histories are plotted  
716 as density of points. Panel c: ratio between the matched and the target envelopes plotted with the  
717 same palette of panel b, the horizontal dashed lines are the ratio values averaged on non-

718 overlapping time windows with a duration of 1 second. Panel d, 2D histogram of the envelope ratio  
719 values computed for all the matched-target data pairs (50850) the palette indicates the percentage of  
720 pairs in each cell. For the sake of clarity, the plot neglects the cell with less than 2% of data. The 1D  
721 histograms are computed in each time-window of 1 s and they are plotted as well. The bins height is  
722 related to the background tone, the corresponding % are described in the legend.

723 Figure 6 Time-frequency analysis of the RSPMatch matching process. *First column* (a) from top to  
724 bottom: the four passes of the spectral matching seen on spectrum response with details on line  
725 types given in the legend. *Second column* (b): target and seed S-transform amplitude followed by  
726 the S-transform evolution of the four passes of the seed time history processed by the spectral  
727 matching software. Details on palette and markers are given in the legend. *Third column* (c): target  
728 and seed time histories followed by the intermediate time histories produced by the spectral  
729 matching software. The accelerogram after the fourth and last iteration is the one whose spectrum  
730 successfully matches the target.

731 Figure 7 Top: 1 Hz acceleration sinusoid with amplitude increasing at each cycle from 0.008 to 0.12  
732 g with increments of 0.01 g per cycle. Such a sinusoid is used as acceleration input to the spring 1a  
733 FEMA model. Bottom: Force-deformation backbone curve of the spring 1a model shown as base  
734 shear normalized by the base shear at yielding versus drift ratio.

735 Figure 8 Overview of the features of one of the 226 real target waveforms and the corresponding  
736 spring response. From the top to the bottom: response spectrum, accelerogram, accelerogram S-  
737 transform zoomed between 1 and 5 Hz, accelerogram S-transform zoomed between 0 and 1 Hz;  
738 drift time-history, drift S-transform, and spring cyclic behavior. The solid vertical line indicates the  
739 occurrence time of the maximum lateral drift. Details on the S-transforms scales are given in the  
740 legend.

741 Figure 9 Comparison between two accelerograms matched to the target spectrum of the  
742 accelerogram shown in Figure 8 and the corresponding spring responses. Each column has the same

743 structure utilized in Figure 8; details on graphic features are reported in the legend. The instant  
744 where the spring reaches a drift higher than 2.5% is plotted as a dashed line on panels (f), (h) and  
745 (l).

746 Figure 10 On the left, comparison between the IM values derived from target records and matched  
747 records for 19 families randomly selected from the pool of 226. The panels on the right show, for  
748 each IM, a histogram of the difference between the median values of the IM measure of the 226  
749 matched families and the corresponding IM value of the target accelerogram. The Legend explains  
750 the different symbols.

751 Figure 11 Histograms of the differences between the drift of the accelerograms matched to the target  
752 spectrum (“matched drift”) and the drift of the target accelerograms. (a) Drift misfit for all the  
753 matched accelerograms. Drift misfit (filled histograms) for matched accelerograms whose seed  
754 accelerogram generated a drift belonging to the *yielding* (b), *strength drop*, *plateau*, and *ultimate*  
755 *classes*. The overlaid histograms refer to drift misfits of matched time histories belonging to classes  
756 that are different from that of the seed. Spring capacity curve are also shown on the right side; the  
757 segment corresponding to the seed class response is highlighted. The Legend explains the different  
758 symbols.

759 Figure A1 Improved cosine wavelets, as implemented in RspMatch 2009, for frequencies spanning  
760 from 0.5 Hz to 20 Hz along with the corresponding S-transforms.

761 Figure B1 See Figure 5 legend for the description of graphic features

762 Figure C1 See figure 8 legend for the description of graphic features.

763 Figure C2 See figure 9 legend for the description of graphic features

764

765 [APPENDIX C: Analysis of the matching effect on the seed waveform](#)

766 The subsidiary question arising from the analysis of matched coda with respect to the target (Figure  
767 5 in section 3.3) is whether the spectral matching systematically amplifies the seed accelerogram  
768 coda amplitude. To give a quantitative answer we compared a seed accelerogram with the 225  
769 accelerograms obtained by matching it to different target (Figure A1a, A1b and A1c). Such a  
770 comparison, which is based on the ratio between the accelerogram envelopes, is done according to  
771 the following steps:

- 772 - Given a seed accelerogram  $S(t)$ , we computed its envelope defined as the amplitude  
773 of the Hilbert transform  $|\mathcal{H}(S(t))|$  (Fig A1a).
- 774 - We manually picked the beginning of the coda accelerogram ( $t_{\text{coda}}$ ) by a visual  
775 inspection of the accelerogram and of the envelope (e.g., see vertical line in Fig 6).
- 776 - We selected the 225 matched accelerograms ( $M_i(t)$ , with  $i$  ranging from 1 to 225,  
777 having the same seed accelerogram  $S(t)$  and we compute their envelope  $|\mathcal{H}(M_i(t))|$
- 778 - We attribute the same  $t_{\text{coda}}$  to all the matched signals.
- 779 - We normalized the accelerogram amplitudes to the same PGA value. This is a  
780 necessary step since the target spectra have different amplitudes. We look at the relative  
781 amplitudes of coda with respect to PGA.
- 782 - We aligned the seed and all the matched accelerograms with respect to  $t_{\text{coda}}$ .

783 A visual comparison of the envelope amplitudes is given in Figure A1b. After  $t_{\text{coda}}$ , the envelopes of  
784 matched accelerograms have scattered amplitude (plotted as density of curves) implying that the  
785 shape of the seed accelerogram coda has been modified. The following step quantifies such a coda  
786 modification by computing the ratio between envelopes. Figure A1c displays the envelope ratio as a  
787 function of time, where the ratio curves are plotted as density of points. The envelope ratio is

788 mainly equal to one before the coda, starts to increase at the end of the strong phase and then  
789 reaches high values (as high as 10 in the example in the figure) on the coda.

790 In order to reduce the effect of the possible errors in picking the  $t_{\text{coda}}$ , and to smooth the local  
791 oscillations of the envelope ratio curve, we computed the average envelope ratio ( $ER$ ) over a  
792 moving and not-overlapping time-window of 1 s.

$$ER = \int_T^{T+1} \frac{|\mathcal{H}(m(t))|}{|\mathcal{H}(s(t))|} dt$$

793  $ER$  values are plotted as horizontal dashed lines in Figure A1c.

794 Finally, we extended this analysis to the whole data set of 50850 waveforms. In Figure A1d the  
795 distribution of the average enveloped ratio is plotted as a 2D histogram. The density of points in  
796 each histogram cell is expressed in percentage of waveforms. Note that to make the figure more  
797 readable the histogram cells with less than 2% (almost 1000 waveforms) are neglected.

798 We observe that the  $ER$  values are scattered in the first 2 seconds of the coda and that the  
799 distributions are centered at 2 (1 in log2 scale). In the following seconds the  $ER$  distributions are  
800 centered on 1 (0 in log2 scale) instead. Therefore, we conclude that the matching process modifies  
801 the relative PGA coda ratio in the first 2 s of signal and, on average, enhances the coda amplitudes  
802 by a factor 2. Afterwards the amplitude modifications are not significant.

803 [Appendix C: S-transform analysis of a matched accelerogram less aggressive than the target](#)

804 We analysed in detail the response of the SDOF spring to three different accelerograms with the  
805 same jagged spectrum. Figure C1 refers to the target accelerogram, which drives the SDOF to  
806 collapse, whereas Figure C2 presents the results of two accelerograms whose spectrum is matched  
807 to that of the accelerogram in Figure C1. The first matched accelerogram (Figure C2 left column)  
808 because of longer coda is gentler than the second matched one (Figure C2 right column ). Indeed, in  
809 the former case the accelerogram larger amplitudes (and the relative energy) are distributed over  
810 longer time windows in the frequency range of interest and, as a consequence, the SDOF enters in  
811 the hysteretic loop but never reaches the ultimate drift. On the contrary, both the target  
812 accelerogram Figure C1 and the second matched accelerogram (Figure C2 right column) both have  
813 a single amplitude (and energy) burst, which is sufficient to abruptly send the SDOF to the ultimate  
814 drift capacity.