

# SO! Amplifies: Maile Colbert, Rui Costa, and Jeff Cain's "Radio Terramoto"

**Maile Colbert**

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## **Abstract**

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## **Keywords**

Music (Subfield), Archival, Digital Humanities, History, Listening, Methodology

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This November 1<sup>st</sup> will mark the 259<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Lisbon Earthquake on All Saints Day, 1755, which destroyed a quarter of the city and beget consequential tsunamis and fires. "Radio Terramoto" is a soundwalk research and art project designed to bring this seemingly distant devastation into contemporary consciousness. Based on the idea of listening to sound from a past historical event, "Radio Terramoto" is a traveling audience immersive event. It's inaugural procession, made up of the creators and audience members, followed a path from the Convento do Carmo down to the River Targus in Lisbon, Portugal. It was also performed this summer in the town of Viseu, Portugal, as part of the [Invisible Places, Sounding Cities Symposium in July 2014](#).

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"Radio Terramoto" is a radio transmission from All Saints Day, 1755. We are not sure how or why the forty minutes were recorded, but having been discovered accidentally it has proven to be an important record of the experience of the people caught in the earthquake. We follow our mysterious ghost recorder from the Convento, where people were gathered for mass. The first wave hits and the convent crumbles. As people run to the river, we follow their path as the buildings around us burst into flames and collapse. Upon reaching the river in a panic, we are only to be greeted by the water pulling out, revealing flopping fish and shipwrecks, pulling towards the ocean to fuel the giant wave that would finally overcome our poor recorder. From here, the transmission stops. (To read this summary in Portuguese [click here](#)).



*The end of the inaugural "Radio Terramoto" performance in Lisbon, 11/1/13*

The project and research for "Radio Terramoto" asks the question, what can listening to the past reveal about the now, both in artistic practice and scientific research? Its site-based (yet mobile) sound design weaves between the present and the past and is based on research on the earthquake, using documents of first hand experiences and the first seismic and "earthquake"-proof architecture that came after what may be the largest earthquake recorded in history.



For the original "Radio Terramoto" soundwalk in Lisbon, first performed November 1, 2013, we walked with the audience bearing a transmitter; the audience carried radios and cell phones tuned into the specific frequency of the transmission. The soundwalk also included hand-held sculptural octahedra created using a geometric framing system designed by [Jake Dotson](#), assembled as a singular form approximating a Pombaline cage, the first modern earthquake resistant architecture. The radio transmitter, and other key electrical devices were suspended in these 1 foot 3 inch octahedra made of brightly colored sticks of wood held together with friction and tension. The large cage broke apart into the individual octahedra to aid in the transportation of equipment and in providing a visual wayfinding aide for the participants.



*"Radio Terramoto" procession, Maile Costa and Rui Colbert in the foreground, Lisbon, Portugal, November 1, 2013*

Like Maile's "[Passageira em Casa](#)," a traveling intermedia work that explores the concept of "home," "Radio Terramoto" changes to be site and context specific with each presentation. When we led a performance in Viseu, Portugal, for example, we began at the Sé de Viseu, moved through the old city center, and ended at a small body of water off the Avenida Emídio Navarro.



Planned future performances of "Radio Terramoto" include a version in Los Angeles that will unite the original team in collaboration with [Jesse Gilbert](#). Gilbert created the program [SpectralGL](#), a cell phone app that enables sound to visually affect the landscape from the video camera as the audience member walks. As Los Angeles has its own fraught relationship with earthquakes, we expect this performance to be particularly resonant and thought provoking.

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Images courtesy of the artists and Jennifer Stoevers (Viseu shots)

**Rui Costa** is a sound artist from Lisbon, Portugal. He is a founding member and artistic director of [Binaural/Nodar](#), an arts organization founded in 2004 and dedicated to the promotion of context-specific and participatory art projects in rural communities of the Gralheira mountain range, northern Portugal. Rui has been performing and exhibiting his work since 1998 in festivals, galleries and museums across Portugal, Spain, Italy and the United States and has been collaborating regularly with the Italian vocal performer Manuela Barile and the American intermedia artist Maile Colbert. Rui Costa is also a regular speaker in conferences and gives workshops dedicated to sound art. For more from Binaural/Nodar, please check out the organization's [soundcloud](#), [vimeo](#), and [flickr](#).

**Maile Colbert** is a multi-media artist with a concentration on sound and video who relocated from Los Angeles, US to Lisbon, Portugal. She is a regular writer for Sounding Out!

**Jeff Cain** is an artist, designer, curator and director of the Shed Research Institute a multidisciplinary art, research, curatorial, and design studio in Lincoln Heights, Los Angeles.

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