

## **Composition as Research**

### On Oriol Saladrigues' Work

Music as moulded time and music as a medium of communication – these two elemental forms of compositional thought are especially foregrounded in the works of Oriol Saladrigues. On the one hand, time appears as the global duration, the extension of the piece, but on the other hand, as a proportion, the relation of its parts to one another, from the level of formal sections down to the succession of individual note-values and pulsations. How these two temporal forms are connected, how this connection can be consciously treated and how, in particular, the approach to irregularities remains at once controllable and as flexible as possible – these questions have been at the centre of Oriol Saladrigues's work for a number of years. From this perspective, composition becomes a form of artistic research and the individual work becomes a test setup, an experiment. Under such conditions, the creative process becomes even more hazardous than it already is, and the composer finds himself confronted with the risk of failure. But beauty can only be found on the other side of security, and Saladrigues knows that. His *Inclinations vers l'instable* for solo cello (2009), a key work for his engagement with questions of temporal organization in music, unfolds a developmental dynamics that feeds off the specific structural links between formal divisions, rhythms and tempi on the one hand, but, on the other hand, is also evidence of a genuine dramaturgical-compositional imagination. This imagination is also apparent in works for several instruments like the *mòbil* (2010) for seven players (with two percussionists as the most important protagonists) or *Moby Dick* (2012/14). Both of these further develop the musical possibilities explored in *Inclinations* and apply them to other compositional levels.

Saladrigues's compositional rigour and explorer's spirit that are in evidence here by no means indicate, however, that his music has no interest in conveying something

to the listener. On the contrary, the idea of communication and linguality is literally inscribed in many of his works; while a composition like *Presse* (2011) for seven voices, orchestra and live electronics operates with the pure sound of phonemes, it also addresses the listener with a clear statement. In *Presse*, Saladrigues articulates a sociologically-inspired media critique; in *Top Ten* (2010) for three voices and ensemble, on the other hand, it is the Internet, with its trivialities and intrusions, that is represented and distorted beyond recognition. The latent theatricality of the language composition and the expressive quality of its vocal writing make both works seem like condensed operas. But even in apparently purely instrumental pieces like the aforementioned sextet *Moby Dick*, Saladrigues exploits the sonic and semantic possibilities of language by asking the musicians to whisper or hiss, both with and without their instruments. Here and in his other works, communication in and with music is simultaneously a means and an object of manifold, dramaturgically ambitious and inventive composition.

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