

## **Knotted Tongues (2012 rev.2014)**

Commissioned and premiered by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra under Ludovic Morlot, Knotted Tongues forms a link in the continuation of a latent cycle of works that contemplates the idea of the 'unreliable machine', itself based on the theory of the 'beast-machine' by René Descartes (1637) which expounds the idea that the body is no more than a wonderfully complex machine. Most bodies are likely to malfunction, fracture and decay through some self-initiated internal change or mutation, and are, therefore, unreliable.

Taking this idea into the musical domain, the formal shape of the work progresses via musical 'states' or blocks that rupture, rather than by organic, motivically-related development. The debris of exhausted states forms or allows a subsequent state to arise. Assonance is preferred to repetition of material. Foreground material competes with dense note saturations only to become tangled and ensnared. Phrases rapidly and energetically propel themselves forward, but are subsequently stymied, halted or caught in loops of repetition.

Whence the title? It is a reference to Benson Bobrick's book on the history (often barbaric) and treatment of stammering, the fear of which the author summarises by the memorable phrase 'the anticipation of the glottal catastrophe'.

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