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Minimalism Meets Gamelan: An Analysis of Diana Blom and Emma Stacker's *Gong Agong* (2006)

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Abstract

Contemporary composers draw influence from every style and period in music history. The current pluralistic approach to composition sometimes poses challenges when analysing new music. Often, difficulties arise because the analyst is unsure of which analytical tool to use. Rather than choose a specific tool to analyse a current composition, this paper suggests that the analyst first discover what styles of music influenced the composers while writing the piece and then analyse the piece by making connections to the influences. This paper examines a recent 21st century electroacoustic composition, Diana Blom and Emma Stacker's *Gong Agong* (2006), looking at how the composers incorporate elements of minimalism and gamelan in the piece. *Gong Agong* was one of three finalists in the Musica Nova International Electroacoustic Music Competition 2006 (Category B: Compositions for acoustic instrument/voice/ensemble and electroacoustic media). This paper also examines how minimalist elements interact with certain characteristics of gamelan to create an original piece. By first recognising the styles that influenced a piece of music, analysing a twentieth (or twenty-first) century piece becomes much less daunting.

Keywords minimalism, gamelan, electroacoustic, compositional influences

Many composers of the twenty-first century have taken a pluralistic approach to composition, adopting any techniques that suit their work. Australian composers Diana Blom and Emma Stacker join a long list of modern composers who incorporate elements of minimalism and gamelan with their 2006 piece entitled *Gong Agong*, a piece for piano and CD soundbed (an accompanimental CD track comprising acoustic sounds that have been altered and rearranged in the recording/editing process).[1] (While the piece is a collaborative effort between the two composers, Diana Blom composed the piano score after Emma Stacker composed the CD soundbed; therefore, throughout this paper I will refer to Blom's contributions when discussing the piano score and Stacker's contributions when discussing the soundbed). Even before the term minimalism was coined, composers were influenced by gamelan music, as shown by Colin McPhee's *Tabuh-Tabuhan* for two pianos and orchestra (1936) and Pierre Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître*

(1953-1957). Composers increasingly found inspiration in gamelan music throughout era of minimalism. Steve Reich's Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ (1973) and Lou Harrison's Serenade for voices, harp, and gamelan, *La Koro Sutro* (1972) are just two minimalist pieces that take inspiration from gamelan.

While *Gong Agong* would not be considered a minimalist piece, it incorporates elements of both minimalism and gamelan music. Blom obviously has an interest in minimal music as she has written articles and her doctoral dissertation on minimalism in Australia and its uses in education. The composers use minimalism as a *technique* in *Gong Agong*, but it cannot be classified as a minimalist piece. That is, while the piece does not contain all of the features of a minimalist piece, it features aspects of minimalism.[2] Not only was Blom influenced by minimalism when composing *Gong Agong*, she was also highly influenced by her time in Hong Kong and Malaysia. According to Blom (1999), Australian composers were incorporating minimal ideals into their compositions long before the first appearances of American minimalism because many were influenced by musics from Asia, in particular gamelan, which shares similar characteristics with minimal music, including repetition, interlocking layers, an unchanging pulse, small pitch-class sets, and tonal centres. Many of the instruments heard on Stacker's soundbed come from Hong Kong and Malaysia. In the preface, Blom and Stacker (2009) explain that *Gong Agong* is the largest gong in Malaysian Terengganu Joget Gamelan (although it is usually spelled "gong ageng") and it plays a structural role in gamelan music. The gong ageng marks the end of one formal section of the composition and the beginning of another in many types of gamelan music. The instrument is the inspiration for the title of the work, but it also apparently serves the same purpose in this piece as it does in gamelan music, marking off large sections of the piece, according to Blom and Stacker (2009). I find it difficult to ascertain how it marks the beginnings and ends of formal sections in *Gong Agong*. My formal analysis of *Gong Agong*, as we will see below, goes against this idea, using motives in the piano and the changing relationship between the piano and CD soundbed as markers of section beginnings.

Nevertheless, *Gong Agong* features many elements of minimal music and gamelan music, seamlessly blended together to create a unified piece that is best described as postminimalist, a term used frequently by Kyle Gann (2013) and others to describe music with minimal characteristics, but also go beyond the narrow definition of minimalism. A detailed analysis of *Gong Agong* reveals the ways in which Blom and Stacker incorporate minimalism and gamelan characteristics, such as interdependent lines, small pitch-class sets, even subdivisions of the beat, and interlocking rhythms, in this work. The discussion begins with minute details of the piece and branches out to more broad aspects, concluding with a detailed explanation of the formal structure.

MINIMAL MOTIVES WITH A HINT OF GAMELAN

Gong Agong does not contain easily distinguishable phrases, but the piano is made up of many short cells separated visually by double barlines on the score. Although

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there are many piano cells in *Gong Agong*, it in fact uses only a small number of motives, each characterised by their unique features. As in minimalist pieces, these motives rarely return verbatim, but are instead varied and developed throughout the piece. Unlike minimalism, there is no systematic process driving the changes to the motives.

Figure 1 shows passages containing numerous variants of Motive A, which is defined by its sustained, familiar triads and sevenths. The first Motive A in bars 2-4, seen in Figure 1a, features an E major triad with an appoggiatura C that resolves to B. The left hand plays only an E-B fifth, while the right hand fills in the third of the chord. The next iteration of Motive A in bars 7-9 adds more rhythmic interest but keeps the same basic pitches. For other Motive A variants, each hand typically features recognisable triads or sevenths, but the hands are treated independently. For example, Motive A in bar 11 features an E major harmony on the first beat, then on the second and third beats, the left hand plays a Db major triad while the right hand remains on an E major triad. Interestingly, these chords share pitch class 8, but they also sound very dissonant because the Db is 10 semitones below the B and F is 11 semitones lower than the E. Motive A in bars 11 and 14 seem to imitate the sound of the "gong agong struck" heard in the CD soundbed. In fact, bar 14 blends seamlessly with the preceding "gong agong struck" landmark.

Blom creates complex sonorities in Motive A by having the hands play two different simple harmonies. Motive A in bar 49 and 51 (Figure 1b) feature simple sonorities, but instead of playing them as sustained harmonies, they are heard as tremolos. Bar 50 features the most complicated sonority: the left hand plays an F dominant seventh while the right hand plays an E major triad with an F#-C# dyad. Figure 1c features A motives from later in the piece, bars 86-88, 89-90, and 92-93. Bars 86-88 have a quicker harmonic rhythm than previous A motives while retaining the use of easily recognisable tertian harmonies. Motive A in bars 89-90 has the sustained sonority at the end of the cell, but uses the pitch-class content and the semiquaver rhythms from Motive D (discussed later).

Figures 1a to 1c: Motives and B and variants of each

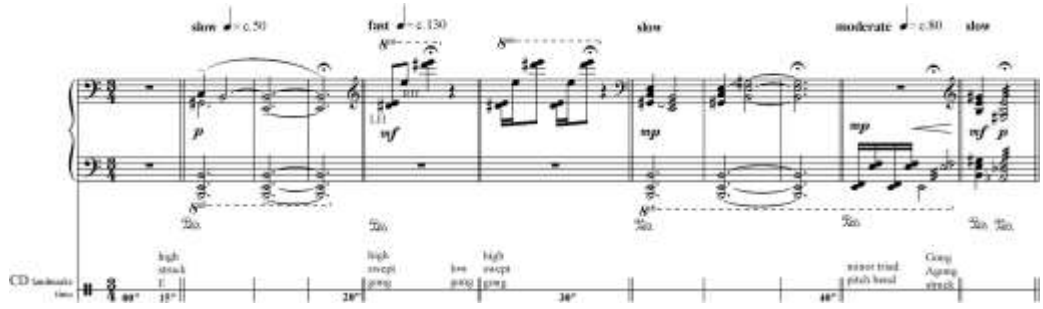

Figure 1a Original statements of Motive A and B, bars 1-11

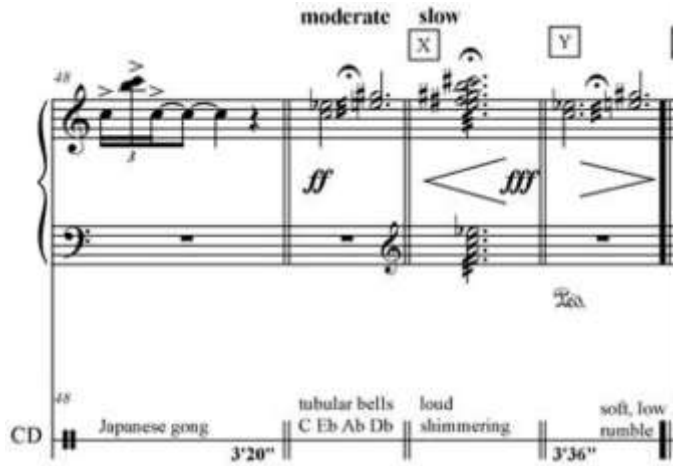

Figure 1b Variants of Motives A and B, bars 48-51

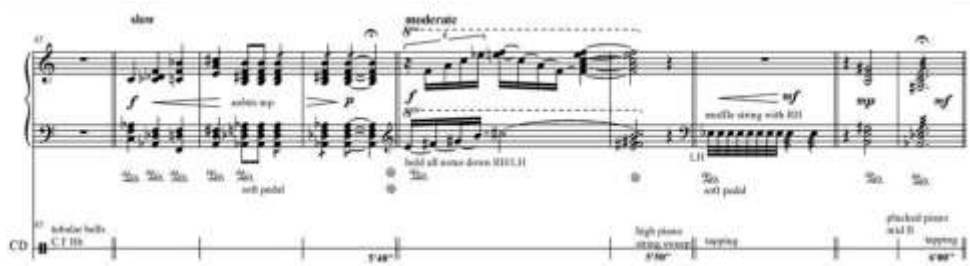

Figure 1c Later variants of Motives A, bars 85-93

Motive B, which is first heard in bar 5 (Figure 1a above), features a dyad with pitch classes {3, 4} played simultaneously and stated in quick succession in two different octaves. The motive imitates the "high swept gong" heard in the CD soundbed, and often precedes or follows it at the beginning of the piece. The rhythm of Motive B frequently changes throughout the work, as can be seen with the iterations found in bars 6 and 10 of Figure 1a and bar 48 of Figure 1b. Motive B also uses pitch classes {4, 5} frequently and {e, 0} once, but it always features a dyad stated in at least two octaves.

In bar 16, we get the first instance of Motive C, a dyad using pitch classes {9, e}, as shown in Figure 2a. Blom expands this motive in bars 24-25 (Figure 2b). It begins with the A-B dyad, but quickly morphs into triplet semiquavers with pitches classes {3, 1, e} played by the right hand and {1, 7, 9} played by the left hand. Combined, these pitches form a whole tone collection on C#, although the

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collection is missing pc-5. These triplet semiquavers mimic the "Japanese rattling bells" heard in the soundbed.

Figure 2a-2b Motive C

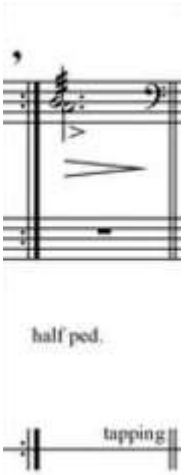

Figure 2a Original statement of Motive C, bar 16

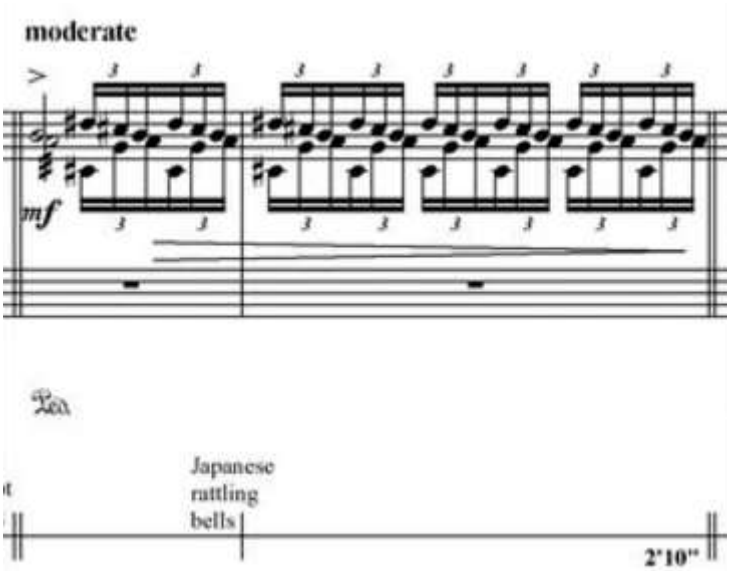

Figure 2b Expanded variant of Motive C, bars 24-25

The piece begins with the piano imitating the soundbed with Motives A, B and C, but in bar 28, the piano stops imitating the soundbed and introduces an interlocking melodic section. Figure 3a features the first statement of Motive D. The right hand contains pitch classes {1, 4, 6, 8, e} while the left hand plays pitch classes {0, 3, 5, 9}. (Some of the A motives share the pitch classes of Motive D. As we will see below, this plays a role in the formal structure of the piece.) Three pitch classes from the 12-tone aggregate are missing in Motive D: pc-2, pc-8, and pc-t. Of these three pitches, only G has been heard previously (in bars 24-26). The next iteration of this motive, in bars 38-46, features the same pitches in the same order as the first statement but certain pitches are in a different octave. This creates more similar motion between the hands in the second iteration.

Figure 3a-b: Motive D and its variants

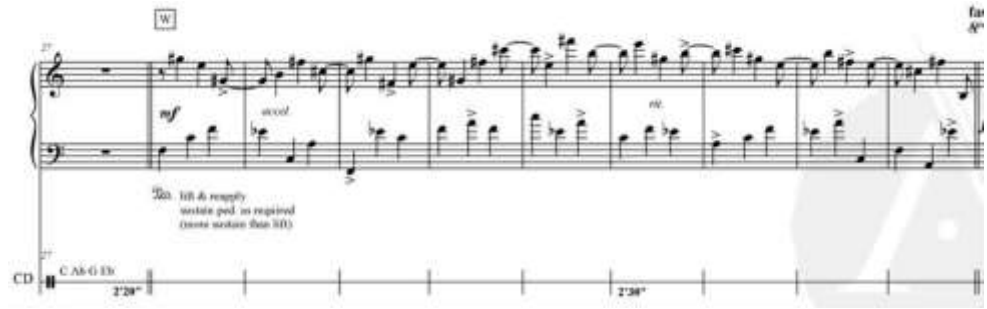

Figure 3a Original statement of Motive D, bars 27-36

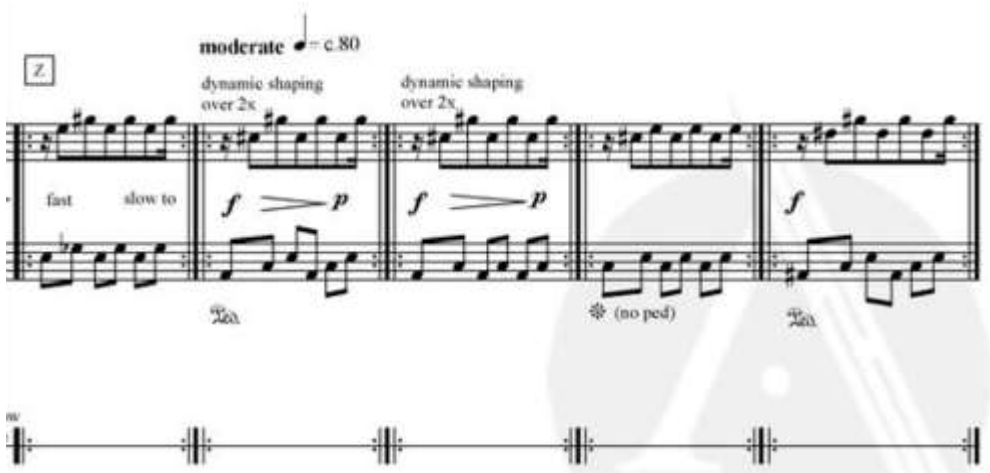

Figure 3b First variant of Motive D, bars 52-56

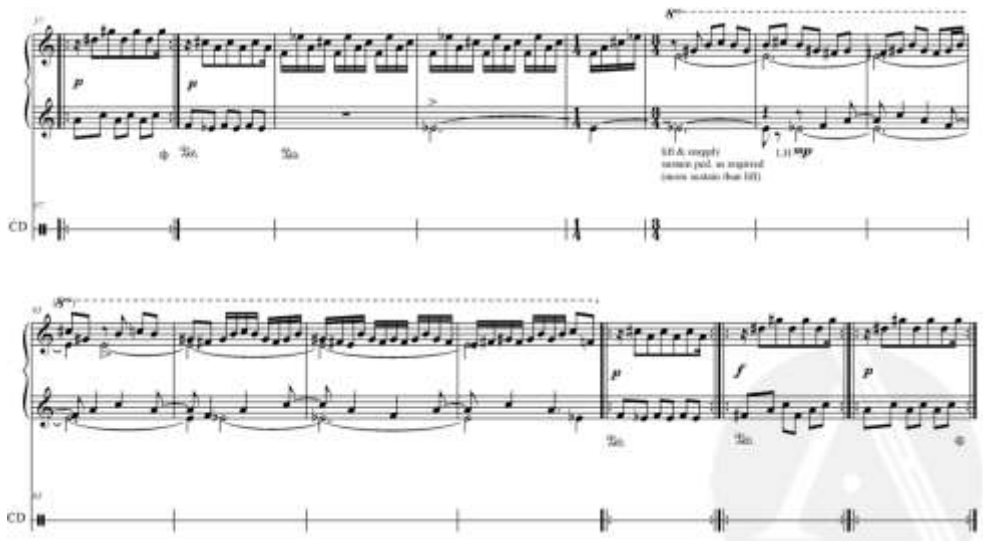

Figure 3c Second variant of Motive D, bars 57-71

The interlocking feature, pitch-class content and independence of the hands characterise Motive D. Despite the fact that the material in bars 52-57 is very different from the original D motive, it shares the unique characteristics of Motive D. Figures 3a and 3b allow for comparison of the first Motive D and the one in bars 52-57. Like the original statement, the left hand begins on the beat and the right hand fills in the gaps. This time, however, the composite rhythm is semiquavers, rather than quavers. This material also for the most part shares the pitch-class content of the original D motive: the right hand retains pitches {1, 4, 8} while the left hand uses pitches {0, 3, 5, 9}. In bar 56, new pitches are introduced in each hand: D# is heard in the right hand (it was previously heard in the left hand as Eb in the original D motive) and F# appears in the left hand (it was previously heard in the right hand in the original D motive). The material in bars 58-68 shown in Figure 3c also relates to Motive D, though it is develped so much that one could argue that it is a motive unto itself. Bars 58-68 abandon the two independent, interlocking parts for a composite semiquaver pattern played by the right hand. This piano cell also introduces a drone in each hand and a slower moving arpeggio pattern in off-beat crotchets in the left hand. The steady semiquaver and quaver patterns in the right hand and the pitch-class sets used for each hand connect this piano cell to Motive D, although it is admittedly a highly developed version of the motive.

Gong Agong uses these four basic ideas throughout the piece with variation—some, so much so, that they become barely recognisable as we saw with the transformations to Motive D. There are a few piano cells that do not really fit any of the motives; I will refer to these cells as Motive X. Figure 4 shows the first appearance of Motive X in bar 82, which is characterised by the repeated Eb. I do not classify this as a full-fledge motive because it appears at such a late point in the

piece and it seems to act as filler material rather than a stand-alone motive. Motive X in bars 82 and 83 (Figure 4) are an extension of the D motive from bars 76-81.

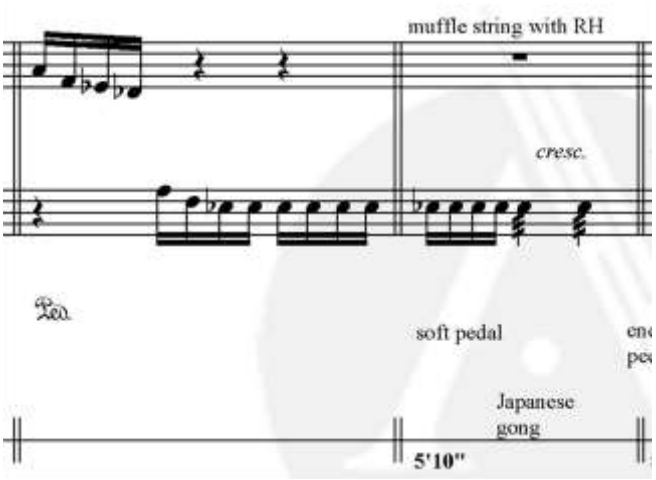

Figure 4: Motive X, bars 82 and 83

Gong Agong, like most pieces that employ characteristics of minimalism, is based on a small number of basic ideas that are slowly developed over the course of the piece. Unlike many minimalist pieces, there is no clear process involved in the transformation of the motives, and one cannot predict the order in which the motives appear.

Having discussed how minimalism influenced the motives, we will now turn to the gamelan influences apparent in each of the motives. Blom imitates the *kotekan*—the high speed ornamental figuration played by instruments in the upper register in gamelan music—in Motive D, but even Motives B and C are distantly related to the *kotekan* (Tenzer, 2011). According to Michael Tenzer (2011), "*kotekan* is usually expressed in English as 'interlocking parts,' because although it sounds as one melody it is actually composed of two interdependent musical lines that are incomplete when played alone and dependent exclusively on each other for obtaining the desired result" (p.54). Blom adapts this idea for Motive D. The hands of the piano are independent, but the two lines are interdependent and, combined, produce an interlocking melody. (Interlocking rhythms are also common in minimalism.) The left hand plays pitch classes {0, 3, 5, 9} on-the-beat while the right hand fills in the gaps with pitch classes {1, 4, 6, 8, e}. The first two instances of Motive D divide the beat in two, but later variants of Motive D divide the beat into four, the typical subdivision of the beat created by the *kotekan* in gamelan music. The drone in the later variants of Motive D may have also been influenced by gamelan. In gamelan, one instrument may play a drone while another instrument plays the melody (Tenzer, 2011, p.51). Each hand in bars 58-68 play both a drone

and an arpeggiated melody figure, but the basic idea may have been influenced by gamelan.

According to Henry Spiller (2008), "each of the two parts of *kotekan* is limited to one or two pitches" (p.99). This allows for greater accuracy at fast tempos. Although the first couple of iterations of the D motive feature many pitches in each hand, the shorter variants of the motive, such as in bars 52-57, feature a limited number of pitches—usually two or three—in each hand of the piano.

It makes sense that Motive D has features similar to gamelan music, since according to Blom and Stacker (2009), the interlocking motive references a Malay Terengganu gamelan piece 'lagu' *Perang* in the piano. This can most easily be seen in bars 62-68 in Figure 3c. Blom's transcription of 'lagu' *Perang*, which can be found in her dissertation from 2001, features two melodic patterns: {^3, ^5, ^6, ^5} and {^2, ^3, ^5, ^3} (app. 5, p.34). Assuming that E is the tonal centre in bars 62- 68, the {^3, ^5, ^6, ^5} and {^2, ^3, ^5, ^3} melodic patterns from 'lagu' *Perang* appear frequently in this passage.

Motives B and C also seem to have been influenced by gamelan, in that there are two lines in which each line plays a limited number of pitches. Although Motive B does not have two distinct lines, one of its identifying features is its use of two pitch classes {3, 4}, {4, 5} or {e, 0}. Later variants of Motive C feature both two distinct lines and a limited number of pitches for each line. The right hand plays {3, 1, e}, while the left hand plays {1, 7, 9}. The lines do not interlock, but perhaps the introduction of this variant of Motive C in bars 24-25, which is more melodic than the previous piano cells, is meant to prepare for the longer, interlocking melody that begins in bar 28 (Motive D).

Blom draws on both minimalism as a technique and gamelan influences in her piano motives. This is not surprising, since minimalism and gamelan share certain features, such as limited pitch content and repetition with variation.

TONALITY À LA MINIMALISM

Often minimal music establishes a tonal centre (Blom, 1999). *Gong Agong* establishes E as a tonal centre at the beginning of the piece but Blom soon starts emphasising F, and we are left wondering which pitch is the tonal centre. As Figure 5a shows, the piece begins with a "high struck E" in the soundbed that is followed by a sustained E major triad in the piano. The pitches used in the B motives at the beginning of the piece, D# and F, are symmetric around E. The first A-type motive that does not feature an E major triad happens in bars 17-18. This A motive instead focuses on F and foreshadows the tension established between F and E as tonal centres later in the piece. Figure 5b features a passage from *Gong Agong* where the left hand is clearly focused on an F dominant seventh harmony, and E is no longer definitively a tonal centre. Near the end of the piece E returns as a focal pitch with a brief reprise of material from the beginning of the piece, but it ultimately ends with a sonority built primarily of thirds stacked above F, as seen in Figure 5c.

Figures 5a to 5c: Tonal centres

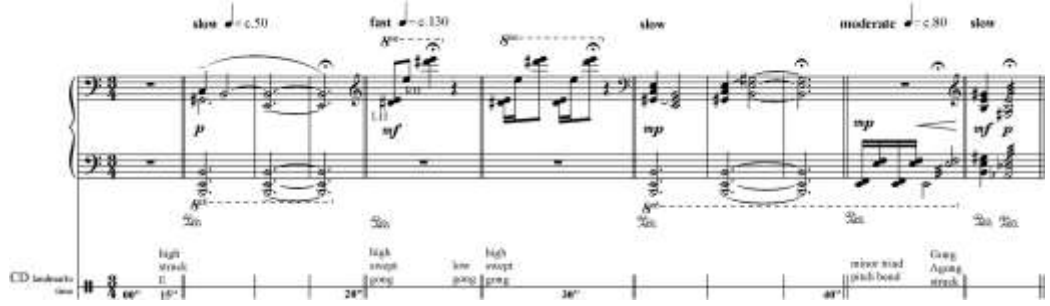

Figure 5a Tonal centre of E

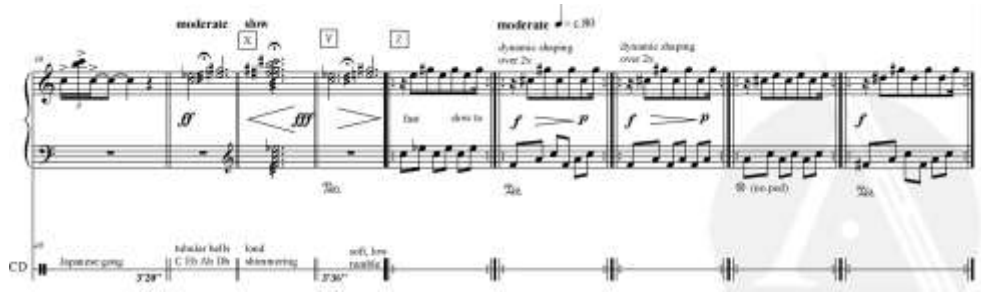

Figure 5b Shifting focus to F

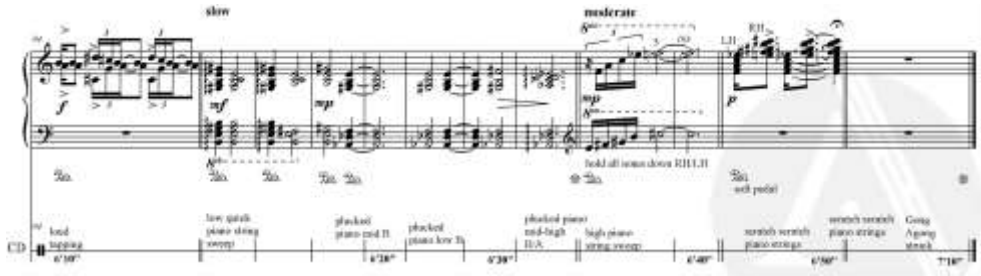

Figure 5c Ambiguous tonal centre, focus on both E and F

MINIMALISM AND THE 12-TONE AGGREGATE

Gong Agong contains the complete 12-tone aggregate, a feature that is not common in minimalism, but the way in which the pitches are used in the piece suggests that minimalism is being employed as a compositional technique. Only nine pitches are consistently employed throughout the piece; G only appears in bar 26, and Bb and D only appear in bar 86.

Each piano cell contains a limited number of pitch classes. As stated above, Motive B only contains two pitches at a time, either {3, 4}, {4, 5}, or {e, 0}. Motive C begins with the dyad {9, e} and in the two later statements of the motive, it adds three more pitches {1, 3, 7}. Motive A is perhaps the most varied in terms of pitch content; it can range anywhere from four pitches (bars 2-4) to eleven pitches (bars 86-88). Motive D also uses a large number of pitch classes, typically nine, but they are used in a very minimalist manner. While there are some variants, the left hand is typically constrained to pitch classes {0, 3, 5, 9} while the right hand is limited to {1, 4, 6, 8, e}. In the shortened version of Motive D, such as in bars 52-57 (Figure 3b above), each bar contains 4 or 5 pitch classes, is repeated at least once, and retains at least two pitches from the bar directly preceding it, making the changes in pitch content very gradual. The middle of the piece features primarily Motive D and its variants; therefore, the pitch-class content—and subsequently, the harmonic structure—of the middle of the piece is rather static, a feature common in minimalism. Thus, Blom's interest in minimalism seems to have played a role in the controlled manner in which pitches are used in *Gong Agong*.

METRIC AMBIGUITY

Blom never changes the meter in the piano score to *Gong Agong*, but nonetheless, she does play with our sense of the beat with numerous tempo changes. The first piano cell indicates a tempo of a quarter equals 50 beats per minute (bpm), which is followed by a sudden tempo change to a crotchet equals 130 bpm—more than double the original tempo—in the second piano cell. Stacker's free flowing CD soundbed impairs our ability to entrain a pulse at the beginning of the piece. Finally, beginning in bar 28, the frequent and sudden tempo changes cease, the piano introduces a rhythmic interlocking melody where onsets happen every quaver, and the listener is able to entrain a pulse.

At this point (bar 28ff), we may be able to entrain a pulse, but we are still not able to establish a meter. The accents on certain pitches in each of the hands and the disjunct melody toy with our senses, making it impossible to guess that the meter is indeed 3/4. As Figure 3a shows, the first accent in the right hand happens on the last quaver in bar 28 and every 10 quavers thereafter, whereas the first accent in the left hand happens on the first quaver in bar 30 and every eight quavers thereafter. This creates a polyrhythm in bars 28-36 and 38-46 similar to Elliot Carter's polyrhythms in his later works. The difference between the polyrhythm that Blom establishes in *Gong Agong* and that which are features of Carter's later works is that

Blom's polyrhythm only lasts for a short period of time, whereas Carter's polyrhythms tend to last for the majority of a piece.

Gamelan is typically very rhythmic with a steady beat but varying tempo. Although it is difficult to entrain a pulse at the beginning of the piece, *Gong Agong* becomes highly rhythmic and steady from bar 28 until the end. As discussed above, Motive D is the motive most influenced by gamelan music. It is no coincidence that we begin to entrain a pulse with the first statement of Motive D introduced in bar 28 since the interlocking rhythms create a steady stream of quavers, which are further subdivided into semiquavers in the later iterations of the motive.

A CONTINUAL TEXTURE

Another characteristic of minimalist pieces found in *Gong Agong* is textural consistency. The piano rarely rests and for most of the piece there is a constant texture of piano sounds and electroacoustic sounds from the CD soundbed. The only change in texture occurs after the climax in bar 52, when the dynamic level of the soundbed suddenly drops and the piano takes on a more central role. The soundbed continues with a "soft, low rumble" that is faintly heard beneath the piano until approximately bar 76 when the dynamic level of the soundbed starts to increase and returns the texture to its original state. The retention of similar articulation throughout the piece contributes to its continuity. Blom indicates that the piano part should be played with pedal throughout much of the piece. This helps the piano blend with the electroacoustic sounds on Stacker's CD soundbed.

One might expect the texture of *Gong Agong* to be generally very sparse based on the fact that there are only two voices heard at once, the CD soundbed and the piano, but the texture can get quite dense because of the heavy use of pedal in the piano. For much of the piece, there are only two piano pitches heard at a time. If these passages were played staccato and without the pedal, this would result in a very sparse texture, but because Blom has indicated to use pedal, the notes—played only a few at time—accumulate and ring long past their initial attack. This creates a dense texture that imitates the envelope of the instruments used for Stacker's CD soundbed. Of course, the densest passages occur when multiple pitches are played at once, such as in bars 50, 86-88 and 95-101.

GAMELAN-STYLE DYNAMICS

Not only do Blom and Stacker keep their piece interesting by shifting the focus from one voice to the other, they also change dynamics frequently. According to Michael Tenzer (2011), dynamic changes in Balinese gamelan tend to be extreme. Blom is highly influenced by Malay gamelan, as she indicates in the preface to *Gong Agong* (Blom & Stacker, 2009). Of course, Malay gamelan is different than Balinese gamelan, but it is interesting that the dynamics in *Gong Agong* are extreme just like in Balinese gamelan. The dynamics of the piece range from pianissimo to triple forte. At the beginning of the piece, the dynamic level changes nearly every piano

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cell. Additionally, the dynamics often exploit the extremes of the range, jumping from piano to forte and back with each new cell.

CONTINUOUS WITH A CHANCE OF LARGE-SCALE FORMAL DIVISIONS

The above discussions of the small-scale aspects of *Gong Agong* will inform the following discussion of its formal structure. The form of *Gong Agong* corresponds to the form of minimalist pieces. Minimalist pieces generally have a continuous form, with no clear formal divisions. Large formal divisions are also rather difficult to discern in *Gong Agong*. After the first hearing, the piece seems to be continuous, with no large-scale formal divisions, cadences, or a clear reprise of material from the beginning of the piece. Although the piece is divided into small cells, indicated in the piano score with double barlines, the listener cannot anticipate the next event because there is no clear order of repeated material and one piano cell leads into the other without pause. (In this way, the form of *Gong Agong* is unlike minimalist pieces since minimalist pieces usually involve a process that unfolds allowing the listener to anticipate the next event.) As stated above, *Gong Agong* is *not* a minimalist piece; it simply uses minimalism as a *technique*. In *Gong Agong*, there is no process that unfolds but the blending of the piano cells and the CD soundbed provides a continuous formal structure akin to minimalist pieces. The CD soundbed continuously adds new sounds until the very end of the piece. Not only do minimalist pieces have a continuous form, they are also generally non- developmental and feel as though they have no goal. Likewise, *Gong Agong* does not seem to have a goal, at least one that the listener can predict. There is a climax around bars 47-51, but that is rather early in this 105-bar piece. The climax is the loudest part of the CD soundbed and the piano, after which the dynamic of the CD drops significantly, and the piano becomes the most prominent voice. Even though this is the climax of the piece, the material before bars 47-51 does not foreshadow that it is building to its apex; we recognise that bars. 47-51 are the climax only retrospectively when we realise that it was the loudest part of the piece. In these ways, *Gong Agong* takes its formal structure from minimalism. But, upon further examination of the piece, there are some indications that the formal structure could be described as ABA'.

The piece begins with extremely short piano cells that are never more than a few bars long, but in bar 28, the piano introduces Motive D, a nine-bar interlocking piano melody that is much longer and more melodic than anything heard previously. The material from bars 92-101 returns to material that was heard in the first 26 bars of the piece. Bars 92-93 correspond nearly exactly to bar 14, bar 94 is directly related to bars 24-25, and bars 95-101 are an expanded version of bars 7-9, 11, and 14. The drastically new material introduced in bar 28 and the reprise of material from the beginning of the piece in bar 92 seems to suggest an ABA' division of the piece. Figures 1a and 1c show the possible beginnings of the A sections, while Figure 3a shows the beginning of the B section. The boundaries of these divisions are not clear, however, until more elements are considered.

The changing relationship between the piano and the soundbed helps us identify the divisions of the ABA' structure of *Gong Agong* more precisely. As mentioned above, in the beginning, the piano imitates the CD soundbed, but in bar 28, the piano ceases simply imitating the electroacoustic sounds and strikes out on its own with a full-fledged melody. The piano returns to imitating the CD soundbed in bar 86; in bar 85, tubular bells playing pitches {0, 5, t} are imitated in the highest pitches of the piano in the following bar (Figure 1c). The return of the imitative relationship between the piano and the CD soundbed suggests a reprise of the beginning of the piece, even though a more exact reprise of piano cells from bars 1- 26 does not happen until bar 92. The material in bars 85-88 is a highly varied form of Motive A, so it is not easy to hear these bars as a reprise of material from the beginning of the piece.

The notation of CD landmarks on the piano score also indicates that the form of the piece may be ABA'. The A section features many landmarks, probably because the piano is meant to imitate the CD in this section. On the other hand, the piano has more independence from the CD track in the B section, so few landmarks are notated in the score. This is not to say that the CD is not heard in the B section, but that the pianist does not need to sync her performance as closely with the CD as she does in the A sections. In the reprise of the A section, there is again many more CD landmarks notated on the piano score.

The introduction of drastically new material, reprise of old material, and the changes in the relationship between the instruments are still not enough, however, to definitively establish the boundaries of the large-scale formal sections. Table 1 illustrates two possible formal divisions of the piece, one with transitions and another without transitions. The material in bars 28-51 seem to be transitional, linking the A section to the B section. After the nine-bar interlocking melody is introduced in bar 28, we still hear material from the beginning of the piece—though, sometimes highly varied—until bar 52, at which point variants of the interlocking melody dominate until bar 84. Likewise, bars 84-91 seem to be a transitional section, linking the reprise of the A section with the B section.

The defining characteristic that confirms our placement of the boundaries is the rare full-bar rests in the piano. The piano rests in bars 1, 12, 27, 85 and 105 (the final bar). The rest in bar 12 is too close to the start of the piece to signal the beginning of a new section and the material after bar 12 is similar to the beginning of the piece, suggesting a continuation of the A section. Interestingly, the other two full bars of rest that happen in the middle of the piece, bars 27 and 85, correspond nearly exactly to the divisions mentioned above. Perhaps, in lieu of a proper cadence, these bars of rest in the piano mark divisions in the formal structure. The material heard in the soundbed during these piano rests seems more connected to the material that follows, so the bars of full-bar rest in the piano are included in the following section on Table 1. Based on the changes of melodic material in the piano, the relationship between the voices, and the infrequent full-bar rests in the piano, we can establish that the A section occurs from bars 1-26, the B section follows from bars. 27-84, and the reprise of A is from bars 85-105.

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Table 1 Formal structure of *Gong Agong*

Measure Numbers	1	2	5	6	7	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	19	20	23	24	26
Motives		A	B	B	A	B	A		B	A	B	C	A	B	B	B	C	A
Bars of Rest in Piano	R							R										
Form w/ Transitions	A																	
Form w/o Transitions	A																	

Measure Numbers	27	28	37	38	47	49	50	51	52	58	69	76	82	83	84
Motives		D	B	D	B	A	A	A	D	D	D	D	X	X	A
Bars of Rest in Piano	R														
Form w/ Transitions	TR								B						
Form w/o Transitions	B														

Measure Numbers	85	86	89	91	92	94	95	102	104	105
Motives		A	A/D	X	A	C	A	A/D	A	
Bars of Rest in Piano	R									R
Form w/ Transitions	TR				A'					
Form w/o Transitions	A'									

CONCLUSION

Gong Agong (2006) is certainly not a minimalist piece; it is not defined by a process that unfolds throughout the course of the work. Blom and Stacker's *Gong Agong* is, on the other hand, a postminimalist piece since the composers go beyond the narrow definition of minimalism, drawing inspiration from both minimalism and gamelan The above discussion centred around ways in which *Gong Agong* incorporates characteristics from minimalism and gamelan. The minimalist features include a few short motives, simple harmonies, small pitch-class sets, a continual texture, and a continuous formal structure. The piano cells typically last only a few bars, and never exceed 11 bars. Additionally, Blom primarily uses only four motives, which are subjected to numerous variations. The harmonies comprise mostly familiar triads and sevenths, and the harmonic structure is relatively static throughout much of the piece. Although *Gong Agong* uses all 12 pitch classes, each motive uses only a few pitch classes in a very structured way. The piece features a continuous, sparse texture and hints at a continuous formal structure, even though the piece can be divided into an ABA' structure. According to Blom (2001), minimalist composers have always looked to non-Western musics for inspiration. This is certainly true as gamelan is a known influence of Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Continuing with the tradition, Blom and Stacker combine minimalism with gamelan in *Gong Agong*. In addition to receiving its name from a gamelan instrument, *Gong Agong* features interdependent lines, small pitch-class sets, even subdivisions of the beat,

interlocking rhythms, and an extreme dynamic range. Of course, the composers were most likely influenced by a great number of other sources in their construction of *Gong Agong*, but characteristics of minimalism and gamelan are certainly the most apparent.

With so many different styles of music from which to draw inspiration, current music tends to be very pluralistic in its design. This can make it rather difficult for theorists looking to analyse a current piece of music, and especially students, as they may not immediately know how to approach the piece. By learning about the influences of the composer(s), those influences may make beginning an analysis much less challenging as it narrows the number of analytical tools need to analyse the piece. By first recognising that minimalism and gamelan were inspirations for Blom and Stacker during the writing of *Gong Agong* I was able to narrow the scope of my analysis, but still cover many of the topics which one might expect from a thorough analysis of a piece: motives, tonality, metre, texture, dynamic range, and form. Rather than choose an analytic technique from the many possible options to assist in analysing *Gong Agong*, the styles of music that inspired the piece provided a way to begin the analysis without being overwhelmed by the multitude of available analytic methods.

ENDNOTES

[1] Emma Stacker now goes by Emma Malfroy. For the purposes of this article, I will use her maiden name as it is the one indicated on the score of *Gong Agong*.

[2] For a detailed discussion of the definitions of minimalism see Timothy A. Johnson's "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" (1994). According to Johnson, minimalism as an *aesthetic* refers to the earliest minimal pieces from the late 1950s and early 1960s that suspended time, feature no goal-directed motion, and developed through a slowly unfolding process or focused on the repetition of a short basic idea. Minimalism as a *style* refers to the use of a number of minimalist elements, such as a continuous form, interlocking rhythmic patterns, steady pulses, bright tone colour, simple harmonies, diatonic collections, no extended melodic lines, and slow harmonic rhythm. Minimalism as a *technique* on the other hand refers to pieces in which only a few characteristics of minimalism are adopted.

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BIOGRAPHY

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