

# The Abduction of the Signifying Monkey Chant: Schizophonic Transmogrifications of Balinese *Kecak* in Fellini's *Satyricon* and the Coen Brothers' *Blood Simple*

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*This article examines the de- and re-contextualisation of 1960s audio recordings of Balinese kecak performances in two landmark films, Federico Fellini's Satyricon (1969) and Joel and Ethan Coen's Blood Simple (1984). It begins with a historical overview that situates kecak's own history as a Balinese cultural phenomenon within broader frameworks of hybridity, schizophonic and appropriative processes, and international filmmaking, devoting special attention to the contributions of Walter Spies. It then proceeds to close studies of kecak's use in the soundtracks of Satyricon and Blood Simple from a theoretical position of schizophonic transmogrification, which is defined as the rematerialisation and thorough reinvention of people and places whose voices and sounds, as inscribed on sound recordings, have been separated from their original sources of identity and meaning and resituated in entirely alien contexts—real or imaginary or somewhere in between—for purposes that serve especially to evoke the strange, and often the grotesque and sinister as well.*

*Keywords:* Kecak; Bali; gamelan; Fellini; Coen brothers; Blood Simple; Satyricon; schizoponia

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## Introduction

In a temple courtyard, more than 200 men squat in tight concentric circles around a small central space reserved for the chief protagonists. Suddenly, their sharp cries of *tjak* begin one of Bali's most thrilling musical experiences—the *ketjak*, or monkey chant . . . Ostensibly, the *ketjak* is a reenactment of the battle described in the Ramayana epic—in which the monkey hordes came to the aid of Prince Rama in his battle with the evil King Ravana—complete with a chorus imitating monkeys, as they chant the syllable *tjak*.

But as perceptive observers have noted, the *ketjak* is primarily a dance of exorcism. Its connection with the *sanghjang* [ritual] remains unbroken. As pointed out by Walter Spies and Beryl de Zöete in *Dance and Drama in Bali*, 'Most of the movements are exorcistic in origin and contribute together to produce a tremendous unity of mood . . . to drive out evil as by an incantation.' (Lewiston 1988 [1967])

The evocative description above is from David Lewiston's liner notes for the LP *Music from the Morning of the World*, a 1967 compilation featuring diverse examples of music recorded by Lewiston in Bali in 1966. It was this record that provided many ethnomusicologists and other international music enthusiasts of the time (and times since) with their first introduction to the compelling sounds of Balinese instrumental gamelan music and related forms, including the 'voice gamelan' (*gamelan suara*) music of *kecak* (*ketjak*), otherwise known as the 'Balinese Monkey Chant'.

The *kecak* and gamelan examples from *Music from the Morning of the World*, and also from other LPs of the period that featured Balinese music, followed predictable pathways to archives and university libraries, public radio station playlists, college course syllabi, and the private record collections of global music connoisseurs. But as they spun out from their locales of origin and into these expected frameworks of dissemination, they also followed different trajectories to more surprising destinations, including the soundtracks of certain European and American films.

Processed and manipulated excerpts of the *kecak* recordings made by Lewiston in the 1960s served as accompaniments to a killing and other vicious mayhem in the soundtrack of Joel and Ethan Coen's 1984 debut film *Blood Simple*, a movie set in Texas. Some 15 years before that, excerpts of another *kecak* recording, this one from a mid-1960s Le Chant du Monde Indonesian music compilation LP recorded and produced by Maurice Bitter, were employed to underscore and animate acts of violation, perversion and degradation in *Satyricon* (1969), Federico Fellini's disturbing cinematic fantasy on an ancient Roman theme.<sup>1</sup>

This article is a study of the decontextualisation and recontextualisation of these Balinese *kecak* recordings in *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*. It is also a case study of what I will refer to as *schizophonic transmogrification*, which links Steven Feld's phrase 'schizophonic mimesis' (2000, 263; see also Feld 1994), discussed below, to the term 'transmogrify', meaning 'to transform or change completely, especially in a grotesque or strange manner' (Webster 1983, 1940). Schizophonic transmogrification is thus a process involving the rematerialisation and thorough reinvention of people and places whose voices and sounds, as inscribed on sound recordings, have been

separated from their original sources of identity and meaning and resituated in entirely alien contexts—real or imaginary or somewhere in between—for purposes that serve especially to evoke the strange, and often the grotesque and sinister as well.

Though the schizophonic transmogrification of *kecak* in *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple* is the central focus of the article, precursory instances of related schizophonic processes are evident in earlier appropriations of *kecak* that occurred on Bali itself, and these too are discussed. *Kecak*, in the past and still today, has been marketed and promoted as an article of authentic, exotic Balinese culture, a portal into the deep and distant Balinese past. Few of the millions of visitors to Bali who attend a *kecak* performance have any idea that what they are witnessing is in fact a twentieth-century invented tradition designed for tourist consumption and born of the collaborative enterprise of Western expatriates and Balinese performing artists. The birth of *kecak* was inspired by traditional forms of Balinese ritual performance, as we shall see, but the genre's crystallisation occurred within the context of early international film projects and developed as a Balinese cultural institution in response to the commercial incentives of an emerging cultural tourism industry. Thus, the story of *kecak's* employment by filmmakers such as Fellini and the Coens is in a very real sense a tale of cultural appropriations of prior cultural appropriations.

### From Schizophonic Mimesis to Schizophonic Transmogrification

For Steven Feld, the phrase 'schizophonic mimesis' encompasses 'a broad spectrum of interactive and extractive processes' that 'produce a traffic in new creations and relationships through the use, circulation, and absorption of sound recordings' (Feld 2000, 263).<sup>2</sup> Consideration of these processes compels us to ask 'how sound recordings, split from their source through the chain of audio production, circulation, and consumption, stimulate and license renegotiations of identity' (ibid.).

This is essentially the core issue explored in the present analysis of *kecak's* use in *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*, but there is also a twist. Feld posits schizophonic mimesis as generative of 'new possibilities whereby a place and people can be recontextualized, rematerialized, and thus thoroughly reinvented', but he also indicates that the new productions stemming from this appropriative process '... of course retain a certain indexical relationship to the place and people they both contain and circulate' (Feld 2000, 263). For all of the myriad misrepresentations and representational abuses he identifies in his insightfully critical study of schizophonic mimesis in what he calls 'pygmy pop' recordings, from Zap Mama's 'Ba-Benzélé' to Deep Forest, Feld shows that the African peoples known as 'pygmies' and the places of their Central African rainforest homelands remain referentially present, and generally explicitly so to some degree at least, in these productions. They may be egregiously stereotyped or genericised into proxy universal symbols of the primitive, the exotic, the African, or the helpless global victims of ecological catastrophe via the schizophonic mimesis process, but they never fully disappear from view and they are never fully extricated from their assigned 'pygmy' identities.

In the case of Bali and the Balinese musicians whose voices are inscribed in the soundtracks of *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*, however, there is nothing even remotely Balinese about any of the people or places encountered in these films, and the use of *kecak* does not serve semiotically to reference Bali or Indonesia in any way, or even 'Asia' or the like in any broader sense, exoticist or otherwise.

In both films, the Balinese voices captured on the original *kecak* recordings function to evoke and invoke emotional states of terror, aggression, and sex-and-violence-inspired voyeurism that are ambiguously mixed and shared among the onscreen characters and the film viewer. It is the presumed *unfamiliarity* of *kecak*'s sound to viewers—yielding an intriguing and profoundly alien otherness that binds the sound object neither to Bali, Balinese people, nor any existing people or place in the real world or any representation thereof—that accounts for that distinctive sound's affective and signifiatory power in the unique and disturbing cinematic worlds created in these films by Fellini, the Coens and their respective collaborators. The quality of otherness invoked is anything but neutral. It taps into a visceral, arguably bio-acoustic, quality of affect that inheres in the forceful masculine energy and sonic virility of *kecak* sound itself. That sound, generated by 100-plus men chanting together in intense, tightly coordinated, complex rhythmic polyphony, lends itself readily to semiotic coding that reinforces long-standing Western cultural identifications of the Other—and a stereotyped 'primitive' male Other especially—with savagery and brutal violence, including sexual violence.

Indeed, this affective potential of *kecak* sound relative to violence is salient not only in its foreign, schizophrenic appropriations, but in its local Balinese cultural domain as well. As is implied in the opening quotation from Lewiston (1988 [1967]), it is a sonic signature of 'monkey hordes' engaged in epic, often gruesome, battle, as characterised by a giant male chorus charged with the task of bringing forth their more base, animal natures (albeit of monkeys of a higher, mythical form than the standard earthly ones) for dramatic purposes. But context determines many other codes for *kecak* sound in Balinese settings as well. For example, it is used in *sanghyang* rituals (discussed below) to nurture female spirit mediums into altered states for benevolent purposes; it also serves to regulate the emotional states of other *sanghyang* ritual participants toward calmness and reassurance. And even in the modern *kecak* dance-drama, the distinctive rhythmic chanting of the 'monkey chorus' is as often tied to scenes of humour, celebration and heroic triumph as it is to those highlighting violence or brutality.

In *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*, however, *kecak* sound is quite exclusively associated with scenes of violence, violation and vengeance that show no evident, explicit relationship to *kecak*'s Balinese ritual or dramatic content or conventions at all. The radical reconstitutions of *kecak* identity that occur in these films would seem to exceed the boundaries of schizophrenic mimesis, since the source referent's complex and nuanced identity as a Balinese cultural symbol has essentially been erased and replaced by an identity to which *kecak* as such is wholly unrelated (but for its bare, recontextualised sonic presence). A more accurate gloss, then, might be *schizophrenic*

*transformation*, but that phrase fails to adequately account for the qualities of monstrosity and alienation evinced in these radical instances of separation and reinvention. There is a need to go one step farther to account for these factors and this takes us to schizophrenic transmogrification, a phrase that evokes the complex convergence of separation, dislocation, alienation, mediation, recontextualisation, polysemous ambiguity and affective power that occurs as the appropriated musical source materials and the onscreen moving images to which they become attached cinematically act to mutually inform, and in turn reform, one another.

### **Precursory Schizophrenia: Re-image-ning the History of the Balinese *Kecak***

The scholarly literature on *kecak* describes the genre in terms of its status as a Balinese dance-drama and musicultural phenomenon, an invented tradition of modernism and cross-cultural collaboration in the twentieth century, a creative synthesis of earlier Balinese genres including *sanghyang dedari* and *wayang wong*, and a lens through which to view Bali's position and status within larger webs and networks of international tourism, commodification and global cultural flow.<sup>3</sup> Yet for all that it encompasses both topically and theoretically, this literature remains anchored in a fundamental premise that the story of *kecak* ultimately flows from and returns to Bali itself and that an essentially autochthonous Balineseness represents the root identity of the genre.

This is one perspective on *kecak*, and an important one, but the present article's view of *kecak* recorded sound as a floating sonic signifier enmeshed in schizophrenic processes and enlisted in international contexts of cinematic transmogrification requires a different kind of background. The story of *kecak*'s emergence and development in twentieth-century Bali is, in and of itself, a complex tale of schizophrenic processes and, not incidentally, one in which both filmmaking and foreign influence were central. Like many musicultural traditions of the world that are labelled and marketed as 'traditional', *kecak* is in most respects anything but, and in fact, schizophrenic circumstances characterised its history from the start. Seen in this light, *kecak*'s reconstitutions in films like *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple* seem less like total departures from the genre's 'tradition' than transformative extensions thereof.

### **Balinese *Kecak*: Drama, Narrative and Music**

According to the Balinese ethnomusicologist and *kecak* choreographer I Wayan Dibia, *kecak*, 'the "star" of the touristic performing art forms of Bali' (Dibia 1996, 75), is 'a unique dramatic form embodying artistic elements of the ancient and modern Balinese culture' that integrates dance and drama, but that ultimately relies for its artistic beauty on its 'intricate vocal chanting', which features a complex polyphony of interlocking rhythmic patterns articulated on the syllable 'cak' ('chak', 'tjak').

The standard, modern performance format of Balinese *kecak* involves a dance-drama of approximately one hour's duration. The drama typically is based on an enactment of one or more episodes drawn from the Balinese version of the Ramayana. The vast majority of the performers, often numbering upwards of 100 and sometimes to multiple hundreds, are men who play the parts of soldiers in the Ramayana's mythical monkey army. These men double as the 'cak chorus' (*pangecak*) or 'monkey chorus' that furnishes the drama's entirely vocal musical score as well. They perform bare-chested and barefoot, wearing a simple costume consisting of a black loincloth (*kain*), a black and white checkered sash (*saput*) and a waist scarf (*umpal*) (Dibia 1996, 30). The lead characters in the danced drama (Rama, Sita, Rawana [Ravana]) wear more elaborate costumes (Figure 1).

The signature episode of the Ramayana enacted in most *kecak* performances is The Abduction of Sita (*Kapandung Dewi Sita*), in which beautiful Princess Sita, the wife of Prince Rama, is kidnapped by Rama's adversary, the demon king Rawana. Eventually, Sita is rescued by Rama's army of monkeys, led by the monkey general Sugriwa and the heroic white monkey Hanuman. Rawana is defeated in the battle preceding Sita's liberation and Rama and Sita are happily reunited. This brings the drama to a triumphant and satisfying conclusion, conveniently avoiding the subsequent unfolding of the Ramayana's tale, wherein Sita, now pregnant by Rama with twins, is unjustly banished by Rama from the kingdom of Ayodya on account of public suspicions that she failed to keep her 'virtue' intact while in Rawana's captivity.

The music of *kecak* is furnished by a *gamelan suara* ('voice gamelan'), which comprises the 100-plus soldiers/musicians of the monkey army cast. The music they perform features the aforementioned interlocking rhythmic patterns on the syllable



**Figure 1** A *kecak* performance in Bona, Bali, 1989 (photo credit: Michael B. Bakan).

‘cak’, along with onomatopoeic renderings of various gongs, drums, melodic metallophones and other gamelan instruments that provide melodic, agogic and colotomic (phrase marking) musical elements. Narration, sung verses and vocal sound effects relating to various aspects of the dramatic presentation are also integral to the style.

Dibia (1996, 75) claims that the ‘essence and soul’ of *kecak* is to be found in its signature sonic element: the multiple layers of interlocking ‘cak’ rhythmic patterns, and indeed, this is the element of the music that is highlighted in the soundtracks of both *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*. Figure 2 provides a notational grid of the principal ‘cak’ rhythms and interlocking sets, with each box representing a single ‘semiquaver’ note and each X (or x) representing a ‘cak’ vocal syllable (uppercase X notes are accented, lowercase x notes are not). The pulse-marking *kajar* part (K) is seen on the top line, marking out ‘crotchets’ (in boldface X notes). Four sets of interlocking ostinato rhythms (with the pattern as notated repeating indefinitely)—*cak telu* (T1, T2, T3), *cak lima* (L1, L2), *cak enem* (E1, E2) and *cak besik* (B1, B2, B3)—appear below that (note that the *besik* patterns roll on beyond the ‘one bar’ notated segment; these patterns require three ‘bars’ to cycle back around, as is implied by the > symbol). An additional standard pattern, *cak pitu* (P), meshes with the larger texture without relation to any specific interlocking patterns.<sup>4</sup>

K	<b>X</b>	-	-	-	<b>X</b>	-	-	-	<b>X</b>	-	-	-	<b>X</b>	-	-	-
T1	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-
T2	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	X
T3	-	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	X	-	x	X	-	x	X
L1	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	-	X
L2	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-
E1	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	X	-
E2	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	X	-	X
B1	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	(X>)
B2	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	(->)
B3	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	-	X	-	(->)
P	X	-	-	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	-

Figure 2 Standard interlocking rhythmic patterns in *kecak*.

### History, Mediation, Representation and Schizophonia

As stated, *kecak* is as much an invented tradition of twentieth-century international collaboration and mediation as it is a phenomenon of traditional, ‘authentic’ Balinese culture. The iconic visual/aural *kecak* image of a group of bare-chested Balinese men chanting interlocking rhythmic patterns on the syllable ‘cak’ while seated cross-legged in concentric circles around a coconut-oil lamp descends from the association of this type of ‘cak’ chorus, or *pangecak*, with Balinese ritual performances called *sanghyang*, translated as trance dance (Dibia 1996, 4) or trance ritual. Prior to *kecak*’s twentieth-century transformations (and to some extent still today), *sanghyang* rituals were sacred performances (*wali*) that took place in village temples. Their purpose was to

ritually purify villages during times of peril and pestilence, usually in response to a crisis such as an epidemic believed to be caused by supernatural forces of evil (McKean 1979, 293). The form of *sanghyang* historically identified with *kecak* is *sanghyang dedari* (lit.: ‘trance dance of the celestial nymphs’), in which the spirits of deified ancestors are believed to enter the bodies of the young girls who perform the dance while aloft on the shoulders of men (Dibia 1996, 5; see also McKean 1979).

*Sanghyang* performances inspired the exotic fantasies of European and American filmmakers who arrived on Bali beginning in the 1920s. The earliest moving pictures shot on the island were silent films made in 1926 by W. Mullens and included *Sanhijang und Ketjaqtanz* (lit.: ‘*Sanghyang* and *Kecak* Dance’), which featured ‘brief and eerie scenes of sacred trance dances’ including *sanghyang dedari* (Vickers 1989, 104).

*Goono-Goono*, a film produced by André Roosevelt, followed in 1930. Roosevelt’s principal consultant on the film was Walter Spies, a key figure in the history of twentieth-century Balinese arts, culture and international image making whose significance relative to *kecak* in particular will be discussed shortly. The author and painter Miguel Covarrubias accounts for the contemporary impact of *Goono-Goono* and the other early films shot on Bali in the following passage from his classic 1937 book, *Island of Bali*:

... the remote little island only became news to the rest of the Western world with the advent, a few years ago, of a series of documentary films of Bali with a strong emphasis on sex appeal. These films were a revelation and now everybody knows that Balinese girls have beautiful bodies and that the islanders lead a musical-comedy sort of life full of weird, picturesque rites. The title of one of these films, *Goono-goono*, the Balinese term for ‘magic’ [or ‘love magic’ (Vickers 1989, 108)] became at the time Newyorkese for sex allure.

The newly discovered ‘last paradise’ became the contemporary substitute for the nineteenth-century romantic conception of primitive Utopia, until then the exclusive monopoly of Tahiti and other South Sea islands. And lately travel agencies have used the alluring name of Bali to attract hordes of tourists for their round-the-world cruises that make a one-day stop on the island. (Covarrubias 1937, 391–2)

While the one-day tourists of Covarrubias’s account came to Bali in increasing numbers through the 1930s, and celebrities from Charlie Chaplin to Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton enjoyed more extended stays, it was another brand of international visitors—scholars, artists and high society global culture connoisseurs with more serious interests in this ‘primitive Utopia’, Covarrubias among them—who began not only to chronicle Balinese culture and society during this period, but to transform it both on the ground and in the international popular imagination as well. The anthropologists Margaret Mead, Jane Belo and Gregory Bateson; the dancer and choreographer Katharine Mershon; the novelist Vicki Baum; and the composer Colin McPhee all spent extended periods of residency in Bali during the 1930s, collectively generating an array of films, scholarly studies, novels, memoirs and music relating to

the island's culture and society, as well as co-creating and commissioning Balinese or Balinese-inspired artistic productions that would influence cultural realities and perceptions both in Bali and around the globe henceforth.<sup>5</sup>

The central figure of the burgeoning expatriate communities of Bali and of the island's emergent cultural tourism industry was the aforementioned Walter Spies, a German painter, intellectual and musician who moved to Bali from Java in 1927 (following a stint as director of the Sultan's European Orchestra at the royal court of Yogyakarta) and lived there until his death in 1942. He became the leading foreign connoisseur and patron of the Balinese arts, supporting the cultivation of gamelan groups and dance troupes in the continuance of their traditional ceremonies, rituals and entertainments, while also commissioning the creation of neo-traditional forms and styles of dance, music and theatre designed specifically with foreign visitors in mind.

Spies gained the status of the reigning doyen of Bali cognoscenti from the late 1920s into the 1930s, as he and his associates fashioned 'their own version of the real Bali based on authentic folk tradition' (Vickers 1989, 105; see also de Zoete and Spies 1939). An important example was his work on the film *Island of Demons* (*Insel der Dämonen*), which, given its title, may arguably be regarded as the original article of schizophonic transmogrification in *kecak's* fascinating cinematic history. It was shot on Bali in 1930–31 and first released in Germany in 1933 (possibly late 1932) under the direction of Victor Baron Von Plessen and Friedrich Dalsheim, who hired Spies as their artistic advisor and ethnographic consultant for the project (Stepputat n.d., 1).

Spies incorporated several scenes of essentially authentic Balinese dance and ritual performance into the movie's fictional tale of good versus evil (Stepputat n.d., 8). But Spies, who had honed his cinematic sensibilities back in Germany in the company of his friend Friedrich Murnau (creator of the classic 1922 experimental cinematic rendering of the Dracula story, *Nosferatu*), was not beyond stretching Balinese authenticity for the sake of art and spectacle. The local Balinese performers with whom he was collaborating were in the process of developing a new tourist performance medium (possibly at Spies's own urging) that decontextualised the *pangecak* chorus from its traditional ritual moorings in *sanghyang dedari* and recontextualised it into a *sanghyang*-adapted dance-drama with a larger number of vocalists, a central narrator and a plot derived from the Ramayana. As Vickers notes: 'It was convenient for [Spies] to direct this adaptation into the film' (1989, 108), though without any sound; in an ironic turn of schizophonic reversal, *Island of Demons* was a silent film that was equipped in post-production with an entirely un-Balinese symphonic score by Wolfgang Zeller.

It was the crystallisation of this innovative dance-drama—a development made possible in large measure by Spies's own *Island of Demons*-funded sponsorship of the project—that laid 'the foundations for a new art form, now known as the *kecak*' (Stepputat n.d., 2; see also Bandem and deBoer 1995, 128; Dibia 1996, 5–9),<sup>6</sup> which was oriented toward commerce and away from religious ritual. The modern, touristic *kecak* dance-drama, with its Ramayana-based plot repertoire, massive *pangecak*

chorus, intricate *gamelan suara* polyphony, and narrator-driven presentation, is in many respects an outgrowth of the *Island of Demons* 'original'. The popularity and ultimately the profitability of this new, dramatic *kecak* as a form of tourist entertainment led to an expansion of the genre from its villages of origin, Bedulu (the home of arguably the first great *kecak* dancer, I Wayan Limbak, see Figure 3) and Bona, to other nearby Balinese towns and villages such as Peliatan and Ubud, and ultimately to locations around the island.

With the advent of high fidelity, mobile recording technologies, the intricate vocal polyphonies and rich soundscapes of *kecak*'s unique musical textures also proved attractive to 'ethno-recordists' (Shelemay 1991, 287) like Lewiston and Bitter, and through the appropriation of their *kecak* recordings into *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*, *kecak*'s complexly intercultural schizophrenic history entered a new phase.



**Figure 3** The late I Wayan Limbak of Bedulu strikes a *kecak* pose for the author (1989) (photo credit: Michael B. Bakan).

### **Into the Labyrinth: *Kecak* in *Satyricon***

In her article 'An understanding between Bollywood and Hollywood? The meaning of Hollywood-style music in Hindi Films', Anna Morcom provides a memorable quotation from Bollywood music director Vishal Bharadwaj, who claims that 'nasty things and the fear and this, it's very easy to do through Western music' in Hindi films (2001, 77). Though the case and the particular issues of Morcom's article are different from those explored in the present article, a paraphrase reversal of Bharadwaj's assertion seems particularly apt to a consideration of the schizophrenic transmutation of *kecak* in *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*. In these films, Fellini, the

Coens and their collaborators appear to have found ‘nasty things and the fear and this’ to be ‘very easy to do’ through *kecak* sound. We begin with *Satyricon*.

The *Satyricon* soundtrack combines a plethora of ‘world music’ source materials from pre-1970 commercially released LPs (Javanese gamelan and an array of other musics from Asia, Africa and elsewhere, in addition to *kecak*) with Nino Rota’s original score.<sup>7</sup> The film itself is a free (and freewheeling) adaptation of the *Satyricon* by Petronius, an ancient ‘novel’ based on retellings of ‘degenerate versions of Roman and Greek myth’ that was ‘lost for centuries and found in a fragmented form, which Fellini uses to explain his own fragmented movie . . .’ (Ebert 2001). Comparing ancient Rome in the time of Nero, the film’s setting, to his own world of the late 1960s when the film was made, Fellini observes that, ‘Then as now we find ourselves confronting a society at the height of its splendor but revealing already the signs of a progressive dissolution . . . a society in which all beliefs—religious, philosophical, ideological, and social—have crumbled, and been replaced by a sick, wild, and impotent eclecticism’ (quoted in Behr n.d.). In the film, Fellini invents ‘a fantasy Rome suspended between inaccessible antiquity and science fiction’ (Borin 1999, 101), into which the emotionally ravaged, hedonistic, inadvertently homicidal and seemingly masochistic pretty boy poet-student protagonist, Encolpio (Martin Potter), is thrown—figuratively and literally, phenomenologically and corporeally—moving from one circumstance of mortal danger and personal degradation to another in a relentless parade of alienating dislocations, sexual perversions and gruesome acts of violence committed by and upon him.

The lengthy and memorable scene of the film that features *kecak* is a case in point.<sup>8</sup> The translocated, de- and re-contextualised sound and energy of *kecak’s gamelan suara* texture serve alternately to taunt, inspire, ridicule, motivate and ultimately condemn Encolpio during a violent, sexually charged ritual drama staged by a Roman religious cult in honour of ‘the god Mirth.’<sup>9</sup> The drama plays out as a kind of reality show exercise in voyeuristic titillation based on an episode from Greek mythology: the battle between Theseus and the Minotaur, a monstrous creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man, in the Labyrinth of Knossos. It all ends up to be a big prank, with Encolpio as the butt of the joke. He becomes an unwitting, tragicomic Theseus as he is forced into a futile battle with a Minotaur-disguised gladiator and then into an ill-fated, ritualised sexual encounter with a woman cast as the love interest of the Theseus tale, Ariadne.

The scene begins with Encolpio, for reasons that are never made clear in the fragmented narrative of the film, being prodded down a giant hill of dirt by spear-wielding Roman sentries. He is equipped with two crude weapons (a burning spear and a large, spike-studded leather glove) and ushered, terrified, into an enormous labyrinth to do battle with the as-yet unseen Minotaur-gladiator.

At first, all we hear is an ominous desert wind rushing through the labyrinth. Then, very suddenly, a loud and aggressive burst of coordinated vocal sound erupts out of the silence. It is the sound of *kecak*, but to Encolpio, and the viewer as well (unless the

viewer happens to be a Balinese music enthusiast), the diegetic source of this sonic explosion is invisible and unknown, as well as taunting and threatening.

Encolpio, startled, looks upward to the tops of the high labyrinth walls, trying to locate the source of the foreboding sound, but without success. Bursts of *kecak* erupt sporadically and unpredictably over the droning sound of the wind, exacerbating Encolpio's already heightened state of terror. The interlocking rhythmic texture of the *kecak* vocals and the invisibility of its source serve to amplify the aggressive, menacing intensity of the scene and to poignantly capture the anxious, desperate internal psychological state of Encolpio himself.

Finally, Encolpio comes upon the gladiator (Luigi Montefiori), his head completely concealed by a huge, horned Minotaur headdress. This Minotaur-gladiator emerges out of the shadows of a blackened corner of the labyrinth bearing a long, thick, blunt staff as a weapon. He is a beast of a man, with the mask of a beast to match. He proceeds toward the terrified Encolpio slowly, methodically, without even a hint of fear or apprehension. The only sounds are of the wind and Encolpio's anxious, heavy breathing. The Minotaur attacks. Encolpio tries to defend himself initially but quickly determines that this is futile. He attempts to run away.

But there is nowhere to hide. The harsh sun illuminates Encolpio as he runs desperately through the labyrinth, and as soon as the sun's light is cast upon him, the sound of *kecak*, now louder and more intense than before, erupts once again. The scene cuts away to show a sweaty mob of hundreds of dirt-covered, half-naked spectators assembled atop a huge, stone wall that offers views down into the labyrinth. They are cheering on the fight in a coordinated rhythmic chant, the chant of *kecak*. Through their 'lip-synching' of the original Bona *kecak* recording, this mob now becomes the evident, visually present (diegetic) source of the *kecak* sound we have been hearing as they continue to spur on the savage spectacle of gladiatorial combat with sadistic glee, seemingly mocking, cheering and jeering the overmatched Encolpio all at once.

This sudden personification of *kecak* sound into the form of a bloodlusting Roman mob transports us across the 'fantastical gap' from nondiegetic to diegetic musical sound (Stilwell 2007, 186), and in this transformative move from invisible sonic presence to visible human presence, the *kecak* is subjected to a trick of schizophrenic transfiguration. The Balinese people who are 'in' the *kecak* recording that resounds across the scene—but who are nowhere evident as themselves in relation to the scene—are 'recontextualized, rematerialized, and thus thoroughly reinvented' here (Feld 2000, 263), first, as constituents of an unknown, unseen and terrifying collective Other, and immediately thereafter as the sonic animation of the taunting, brutal mob that physically materialises at this point in the film as one of the many discomfiting features of Fellini's ancient Rome fantasy. Through the propulsive rhythmic energy and evocative, bio-acoustically 'aggressive' vocal soundscape of this alien-sounding music, *kecak* serves its purposes brilliantly on both sides of the fantastical gap, and moreover highlights the liminal space of 'destabilization and ambiguity' that essentially defines that gap (Stilwell 2007, 186).

Encolpio eventually finds his way out of the labyrinth, followed by the Minotaur. They continue to fight, with the *kecak*-chanting mob now in close proximity. Encolpio is finally struck to the ground. He surrenders. The *kecak* chanting stops immediately, leaving only the sound of the wind. The defeated Encolpio now offers himself to the giant gladiator as a love slave. He pleads for his life and proclaims that he is just a student and a poet, that he is no Theseus. He protests that he should never have been the victim of this cruel joke and implores the Minotaur-masked gladiator to reveal his true identity. The gladiator ultimately obliges, removing his mask and appealing to the Roman proconsul presiding over the whole affair to not only spare Encolpio's life, but also to reward him for having been such a good sport in this comically uneven ritual battle.

Encolpio goes from victimised to vindicated in an instant. A proxy Ariadne (Elisa Mainardi) is seen being ritually prepared for seduction by our stand-in Theseus. The proconsul instructs Encolpio to go to her. Alas, his sexual potency, prodigious earlier on in the film in encounters with women, men and boys alike, has disappeared.

Once again, *kecak* proves to be the perfect aural counterpart to Encolpio's misbegotten antics. At first, it serves to signify primitive virility and the titillation of the spectator mob as they anticipate enjoying a good show of ritualised sexual conquest. Energetic *kecak* music commences the moment Encolpio mounts 'Ariadne'. It continues as the camera pans to her face, which first registers arousal and then disgust as Encolpio goes flaccid. The sound of *kecak* fades away and disappears, as anticipated virility is replaced by disappointing impotence. Rattled but determined, Encolpio begs the seductress for another chance. He thrusts forward onto her again, reanimating the *kecak*-chanting crowd, but the result is the same and the *kecak* fades out once more. This time she curses him, spits on him and kicks him into the ditch that has been dug around her ritual love altar. As the proconsul, his entourage and the *hoi polloi* vacate the ritual ground hastily, some angry members of the mob run toward the ditch throwing rocks at poor Encolpio. The sound of *kecak* reemerges to underscore their hostile rage and Encolpio's fearful anguish, then dissipates once again, leaving Encolpio accompanied only by the sound of the wind and his sometime friend, sometime enemy, Ascylo (Hiram Keller), as he lies injured and distraught in the ditch. 'My sword is blunted', Encolpio whines to Ascylo, who laughs derisively at him in response to this latest humiliation.<sup>10</sup>

### **Making the Audience Feel It: Musical Affect in *Blood Simple***

Compared with the extensive use of *kecak* recorded sound in *Satyricon*, which largely dominates the soundtrack throughout the 10-plus minute duration of the scene described in the preceding section, the employment of *kecak* in Joel and Ethan Coen's dark, psychological murder-and-revenge drama *Blood Simple* is relatively sparse. It is

heard in just two scenes, and for only about a minute in each, but its impact on the film is profound nonetheless.

*Blood Simple* was the first feature film made by the Coen brothers, whose more recent efforts have included *No Country for Old Men*, winner of the Oscar for Best Picture at the 2007 Academy Awards. *Blood Simple* is a sinister and macabre Texas tale of an adulterous wife, Abby (Frances McDormand); her lover, Ray (John Getz); her enraged and estranged husband, Marty (Dan Hedaya); and a psychopathic private investigator cum hit man cum cold-blooded murderer, Visser (the brilliant M. Emmet Walsh), who ultimately is revealed to be bent on the destruction of all three members of this severely dysfunctional love triangle.

The film's title comes from the Dashiell Hammett novel *Red Harvest*. Hammett, along with other authors of *noir*-esque 'pulp fiction' detective novels—Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain most especially—had been major influences on the Coens since their youth, and *Blood Simple* was at once modelled after, a tribute to and a quirkily creative departure from the crime novel genre defined by such writers. As Ronald Bergan explains, the film 'captures the soullessness of much of American pulp fiction. The main characters, though classic archetypes of the genre—The Husband, The Wife, The Lover—are caught in a Greek tragedy of errors . . . . Everyone is in the dark (*noir*). None of them knows what is going on as they only see part of the whole. The audience knows everything and can only watch helplessly as the characters on the screen stumble around without all the facts' (2000, 85). One is reminded by this description of Encolpio's predicament in *Satyricon*.

In *Red Harvest*, the phrase 'blood simple' was used by Hammett 'to convey the state of confusion that plagues a murderer after he has killed, causing him to make mistakes' (Levine 2000, 14). The unnamed detective hero of *Red Harvest* states that after a person kills somebody, 'he goes soft in the head—blood simple. You can't help it. Your brains turn to mush' (Bergan 2000, 74). This is the condition that ultimately awaits all of the main characters of *Blood Simple* in one way or another (with the arguable exception of Abby), some on account of murders they have actually committed, others on account of murders they *think* they have committed but that may not actually have happened at all. The blood simple syndrome has its greatest effect on the film's detective antihero, Loren Visser. Unlike detectives in conventional *noir* films and pulp fiction novels, Visser is, pure and simple, 'a force of destruction and evil' (Levine 2000, 15), albeit one marked by signature touches of humorous, Coen-esque idiosyncrasy with his sweat-drenched canary yellow leisure suit, beat-up Volkswagen Beetle and big Stetson hat (Levine 2000, 15; Bergan 2000, 84).

Joel and Ethan Coen wanted a score for *Blood Simple* that would be both subtle and evocative, 'one that affected the audience's emotions without beating them over the head' (Levine 2000, 29). Enter Carter Burwell, a talented artist, computer animator, performing musician and composer who had never composed a film score of any kind, let alone one for a full-length feature film. He created an audition demo tape for the Coens, on which, as he explains:

[I used a] Synclavier along with my piano at home and some basic tape techniques to develop a handful of sketches . . . some of which used manipulations of industrial sounds or field recordings of chain gangs played backwards<sup>11</sup> . . . Those sketches [which became the basis of the final score] were fairly electronic in tone but as I rehearsed we saw that solo piano had an interesting effect on the picture. It added a warmth and poignancy that drew us to the characters, and which made the psychological torture of those characters all the more excruciating for the viewer – and satisfying for us. (Burwell n.d.)

Burwell's goal of using music to heighten the disturbing effect of the film to an extreme degree tied to a larger agenda of the Coen brothers' cinematic approach. Ethan Coen articulates the matter in these terms: 'When you're thinking about how to handle a murder, you can either say, "This character dies", or you can make the audience feel it. We want to grab them by the lapels and make them feel it. They're not there to get information; they're there to feel it' (in Levine 2000, 27).

Musically speaking, nowhere is this 'grab them by the lapels and make them feel it' mission of *Blood Simple* more evident or effective than in the two climactic scenes that are accompanied by Burwell's manipulated excerpts from David Lewiston's (uncredited) Nonesuch *kecak* recordings. These scenes collectively feature, among other nasty and fearful things, an attempted rape, the graphic crunch of breaking finger bones, a vicious kick to the testicles and finally, a killing. *Kecak's* affective presence heightens the 'feel it' impact of all of this nasty business to an exponential degree.

It was Burwell's idea to incorporate *kecak* into the *Blood Simple* soundtrack. He had developed a strong interest in Balinese music at the time he was working on the film, he explained to me, and was playing in an 'informal gamelan ensemble' on the Lower East Side of New York City that 'would perform the *kecak* sometimes from a "score" that a member of the group had transcribed'.<sup>12</sup> According to Burwell, the *kecak* was used in *Blood Simple* 'largely as a way of heightening the experience for the audience. There is something about the use of voice in a score that draws a special attention from the listener. The *kecak* brings that experience along with a mysterious element . . .'.

The 'mysterious element' is rendered so due to *kecak's* presumed unfamiliarity—and thus lack of a pre-existing identity as such—for *Blood Simple* viewers. Divorced as it is from its context of origin, *kecak's* sound, as a floating sonic signifier, is inevitably rematerialised and reinvented in meaning and affect by the new context that now situates and frames it. It becomes a reflection, an embodiment and an ambiguous signifier of, on the one hand, the evil, monstrosity, viciousness and victimisation that define the scenes it accompanies and informs, and, on the other hand, of the strength, resolve and arguably righteous vengeance of the victimised protagonist (Abby) in those same scenes. Through the schizophrenic erasure of Balinese *kecak* identity *per se* and the situating of *kecak* sound in *Blood Simple's* cinematic world of vicious brutality, a disturbing yet effective transmogrification of *kecak* is achieved.

**Kecak Transmogrified, Scene 1: Abby Fights Back**

At the beginning of *Blood Simple*, we see two silhouetted heads through the rear window of a car. The driver is Ray; the passenger is Abby. Ray's car cruises down a desolate country road somewhere in Texas in the dark of night. It is raining.

'He gave me a little pearl-handled .38 for our first anniversary,' Abby tells Ray.

'Uh-huh,' Ray grunts.

'Figured I'd better leave before I used it on him,' says Abby.<sup>13</sup>

'Him' is Abby's husband, Marty. She is leaving him. Ray, a bartender at Marty's roadhouse strip club, is driving her to Houston to get a fresh start. They don't get there, instead ending up in a roadside motel making love. Alas, they have been followed to the motel by the private investigator, Visser, who is working for Marty. Visser gets incriminating pictures of the couple and turns them over to Marty, who is enraged.

Abby and Ray soon realise that Marty has found them out. Abby moves in with Ray, fearing Marty's reprisal. Ray has no apparent fear of Marty, however. He coolly confronts Marty outside the strip club and proceeds to taunt him in a subtle, passive-aggressive manner.

Cut to Ray's bungalow. Abby is waking up after a fretful night. Ray is still asleep. Abby gets up quietly and walks down the hallway into the living room. We hear nothing but her light footsteps. No music. No other sound. She reaches into her purse and takes out a small, plastic compact, flipping it open and looking briefly at her reflection as she brushes back her hair nervously. Then she turns with a start as she hears something unexpected, the panting of a dog. 'Opal?' she says in confusion and muted alarm as she looks over to see Marty's German Shepherd sitting on the other side of the room.

A few tense seconds of suspended animation pass, then SMACK! Marty's big right hand clamps down violently on Abby's mouth as he grabs her from behind in a full-body headlock. At precisely the same moment, the sound of *kecak* sneaks into the soundscape. The dynamic level is very soft at first, and this, combined with the addition of a reverb effect to the original recording, makes the *pangecak* chorus initially sound distant and indistinct. But the perpetual motion of the continuous stream of interlocking rhythm generated by the *pangecak* projects an aggressive intensity that instantly amplifies and compounds both Marty's frenzied, rageful psychological state and Abby's abject terror. The prominence of the syncopated *cak lima 2* part in the mix (L2 in Figure 2, which is reproduced against the pulse-marking *kajar* [K] part below in Figure 4), a distinctive feature of the original Lewiston recording, adds further intensity to the music's aggressive sonic force.

K	X	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X	-	-	-	X	-	-	-
L2	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-	x	X	-

**Figure 4** The *cak lima 2* rhythmic pattern.

Abby tries to scream, but to no avail. ‘Lover-boy oughta lock his door’, Marty whispers menacingly as he slides his free hand up under her nightgown. The propulsive rhythmic drive of *kecak* continues as the volume of the music rises dramatically. ‘Lotta nuts out there’, he adds, sarcastically. Abby lunges for her purse as Marty drags her backward. It falls to the floor and out drops the .38 and the rest of the purse’s contents. She thrusts forward helplessly for the gun, which Marty looks down at in disgust. Through all of this, the sound of *kecak* charges forward insistently as its volume continues to rise. The formerly distant, indistinct *pangecak* now begins to feel like a titillated and violence-seeking mob that is actually present inside or just beyond the room.

‘Let’s do it outside’, Marty sneers, dragging Abby toward the front door, ‘in nature’. He forces her through the screen door. Suddenly, the point of view changes dramatically as Marty and Abby tumble out of doors in their tortuous embrace. They now appear very small in the frame, encompassed by the distortedly vast expanse of Ray’s front lawn in the extreme wide-angle view. The *kecak* mob continues unabated, but with a sudden cut to a different section of the recording. Three very loud and forceful unison shouts erupt from the *pangecak*—‘Cak! Cak! Cak!’—momentarily disrupting the continuous flow of interlocking rhythm that has prevailed up to this point. Then the interlocking is back, but much louder now, faster than before, and ever more volatile and intense.

The camera sweeps inward towards Abby and Marty from the wide-angle view at breakneck speed until we feel like we are virtually inside their tussling bodies. It is as though we have been swept up by the invisible *kecak*-shouting mob and are closing in on Abby and Marty with suffocating force. Both the volume and reverb are ratcheted up, enhancing the disturbing, swarming effect.

The camera closes in on Abby grasping for Marty’s hand. She grabs his finger and snaps it back violently. The *kecak* volume rises again as the finger fractures and we hear an excruciating CRACK! Marty reels back, raising his hand high to strike Abby hard across the face. His eyes bulge with pain, surprise and venomous hatred as the *kecak* volume and intensity rise up once more, now to unprecedented heights. Then, just before the strike, there is a thud. Abby has delivered a solid kick to Marty’s groin and at that exact moment the *kecak* stops abruptly, leaving a void of silence. Marty sinks to his knees, writhing in pain and grabbing his crotch. He falls to the ground as the camera zooms in for one last close-up view of him vomiting on the ground.

From the moment of Marty’s attack to the final kick to his groin, this entire ‘Abduction of Abby’ episode is driven forward by the animating sonic presence of schizophrenically recontextualised and transmogrified *kecak* sound. *Kecak*’s signification is again, as in *Satyricon*, polysemous and potentially ambiguous. Marty’s rapaciousness, Abby’s terror, the salacious ‘mob presence’ of the invisible *pangecak*, Abby’s vengeful resilience and Marty’s humiliating emasculation in the face of it are all bound together around *kecak* in a complexly polyphonic process of music-to-moving image semiosis.

From this point forward in the film, Marty will turn to others—specifically, to one other, Visser—to take care of the dirty work he now realises he cannot handle. He hires Visser to kill Abby and Ray, setting in motion a chain of events that will finally lead to both Marty’s and Visser’s own deaths, the latter of which is also the occasion in the film that prompts *kecak*’s climactic reprise.

### ***Kecak* Transmogrified, Scene 2: Abby’s Revenge and the Killing of Visser**

The *kecak*-accompanied scene described in the preceding section begins at about the 23-minute point of *Blood Simple*. *Kecak* is not heard again until an hour or so later during the film’s closing scene, in which the evil Visser is finally killed by Abby.

The lead-up to this climactic scene finds Abby cowering in her darkened new upper-floor apartment. Her beloved Ray has just been brutally murdered and his body lays crumpled on the floor drenched in his own blood. We hear slow, deliberate footsteps coming down the hallway. It is Ray’s murderer approaching. We know this to be Visser, but Abby is under the mistaken belief that it is Marty (who is in fact already dead). Visser is now after Abby, the last surviving member of the despicable love triangle that has caused him so much trouble and inconvenience by this point in the film.

Before Visser can break the lock and enter the apartment, Abby silently escapes through the bathroom window into Ray’s apartment next door. Visser surveys the scene and figures out what has happened. He reaches his white-gloved right hand out of Abby’s bathroom window and attempts to prise open the window into Ray’s apartment (which Abby has closed behind her). He manages to open the window, only to have Abby slam it down and pin his hand to the sill with a large hunting knife. Blood spurts from the glove and Visser screams out in pain as Abby rears back in horror at the sight of the savaged, seemingly disembodied hand of her would-be assailant.

In one of the more gruesome cinematic scenes one would ever want to witness, Visser manages to shoot and then punch his way through the wall with his good left hand, finally using it to extricate his mangled right hand from the sill and pulling it—and the rest of him—back into Abby’s bathroom. Meanwhile, Abby has snuck out of Ray’s apartment and back into the main room of her own, locating and picking up her little pearl-handled .38 on the way. She has a steely look in her eyes as she moves silently across the room.

She moves to a position directly across the room from the bathroom door, which is slightly ajar. She focuses intently on the door and fixes her gaze on the streak of light streaming through the open crack into her dark apartment. She leans back against the wall, sinking to the floor, gun in hand, and waits at the ready, staring wilfully. At the moment she slides down along the wall, we hear the faint rumblings of a new musical cue fading up from the austere silence. There is only a simple drum ostinato at first, but as the sound builds gradually and progressively in volume and intensity, two

other layers emerge, first a marimba-like idiophone part and then a loop of *kecak* interlocking vocals.

As the drum and 'marimba' parts level out, the *kecak* continues to grow until it dominates the texture. *Kecak* sound binds together the scene as the camera shots cut back and forth between Visser and Abby. First there is Abby, poised and prepared to strike from her seated, back-against-the-wall position. We follow her gaze over to the bloody corpse of Ray and a mixed expression of loss, sadness and a desire for vengeance flashes across her face. Next we cut to Visser in the bathroom. The camera angles upward from below to a close-up view of his bloodied face. His expression, too, is complex as he walks cautiously yet deliberately across the bathroom floor. He registers an odd combination of courageous resolve, psychopathic menace and barely concealed terror.

The camera cuts back to Abby as she lifts her gun and stares ever more intently and wilfully at the bathroom door. At precisely this moment, the *kecak* chanting pushes subtly yet substantially upward in the mix, heightening our sense of growing anticipation and linking the sound to Abby's determination to take care of this messy business once and for all. Back to Visser, the camera now even closer in on his face from below. Now he looks meaner, more determined, more confident, more dangerous. The *kecak* chanting grows stronger. Visser's fear has disappeared. Maybe *kecak* is to be his power symbol, not Abby's, after all. Back to Abby one more time as the musical ascent continues with *kecak* at the fore. She stares at the door, almost transfixed, steadily pointing her gun straight ahead, albeit with the slightest of trembling. Now Visser's shadow falls across the crack in the doorway as he proceeds toward the door.

BANG! A shot rings out from Abby's gun and we hear Visser shout in pain just as the *kecak*-dominated music comes to an abrupt halt in mid-phrase. A circle of light shines through the bullet hole in the door. There is a second or two of silence, then we hear a thump as Visser collapses to the floor, dying.

Abby looks forward, eerily calm, almost expressionless. The vestiges of *kecak* sound linger and permeate the silence, and that sound now seems to belong to Abby, not Visser. It is as though it has transformed from a symbol of threat and violence against Abby into a potent weapon whose power she alone possesses the ability to harness in her efforts to defend herself against those who would harm her. *Kecak*, as a signifying sonic presence, has become both a character and a psychological tool of the *Blood Simple* drama. It is all a strange, postmodern twist on the original Ramayana *kecak* drama perhaps. This story's Sita, the quasi-heroic Abby, refuses to resign herself to unjust condemnation and treatment at the hands of the men in *her* life, be they untrusting husbands, violent abductors, embodiments of evil, or all of the above. She fights back, and in a certain sense she wins. When all is said and done, she is the one with *kecak's* monkey army on her side, managing, with a final nod to Walter Spies, 'to drive out evil as by an incantation'.

## Conclusion

This article has explored the circuitous journey of Balinese *kecak* from its roots in *sanghyang dedari* ritual, to its recontextualisation as the basis of an iconic and complexly mediated modern Balinese dance-drama, to its schizophrenic transmutation in two landmark films, Fellini's *Satyricon* and Joel and Ethan Coen's *Blood Simple*. The particular chains of production, circulation and consumption that led from the inclusion of *kecak* tracks on 'small-scale, low-budget, and largely nonprofit ethnomusicological records' (Feld 2000, 274) such as *Music from the Morning of the World* to the appropriation and manipulation of *kecak* sound in these modern, international films are inescapably tied to what Feld has characterised as a larger schizophrenic condition. This condition is defined by 'complex representations and commodity flows that are neither ideologically neutral, unfailingly positive, or particularly equitable'. It represents, according to Feld, the current ethnomusicological reality, in which 'discourses on world music are inseparable from discourses on indigeneity and domination' (ibid., 263, 274).<sup>14</sup>

Such matters of ethics have not formed the focus of this essay, but it can at least be said that borrowing, stealing, appropriating, hybridising, decontextualising, recontextualising, exoticising, mediating and intentionally misrepresenting 'tradition' have been part and parcel of *kecak*'s local and transnational history as a Balinese cultural (and also cinematic) phenomenon from the start, as we have seen. Without excusing the improprieties of Fellini, the Coens or their respective collaborators in neglecting to properly credit or remunerate the creators and producers of the *kecak* recordings from which they drew material in *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*, I maintain that their radically creative employment of *kecak* sound in these films is eminently worthy of scholarly attention, both on its own terms and in relation to the continued vitality and transformation of this compelling Balinese musicultural tradition.<sup>15</sup>

In both *Satyricon* and *Blood Simple*, *kecak* sound, transmogrified to function as a signifier of terror, fear, alienation, mockery and strength, is applied to disturbing scenes that highlight violent abduction and aggression; sexual virility, denigration, impotence and emasculation; vengeance and slaughter. The music's ambiguously coded relationship to the characters and action on the screen serves to simultaneously amplify both the violation/degradation and inspiration/vindication of the films' protagonists and their adversaries.

The same states of being done to and doing unto others—violence, abduction, sexual violation, vengeance, slaughter—may be found readily and in abundance in the epic tales of the Ramayana that form the foundation of *kecak* drama and narrative in Bali. However, there is no evidence to suggest that *Satyricon*'s or *Blood Simple*'s appropriations of *kecak* music were influenced at all by the genre's Balinese dramatic traditions. Rather, it was the sound of *kecak* itself, aided and abetted by a kind of phenomenological absence of perceived entrenchment in the conventional Balinese cultural moorings that might otherwise have defined and constrained it, that seems to

have fired the cinematic imaginations of Fellini and the Coens and their musical collaborators, yielding forays into brave new worlds of signifying monkey business.

'The Western imagination has long considered music a phantasmic language through which the unspeakably alien may be evoked', writes Linda Phyllis Austern (1998, 26). Whether through the evocation of an unspeakably alien ancient Roman culture of the imagination or an unspeakably alien world of cruel, inhumane, neo-*film noir* (post)modernity somewhere deep in the heart of Texas, *kecak* has proven highly effective in the project 'of making strange in order to make sense' (Stilwell 2007, 186), at least sense of a certain contorted and deeply disturbing kind.

## Notes

- [1] My thanks to Aaron Bittel and his associates at the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive for providing me with copies of the original *kecak* LP recordings of this period and for their assistance in determining dates of publication of specific recordings and other discographic details.
- [2] Though the concept of 'schizophonia' in ethnomusicology has been largely identified with the work of Steven Feld, the term was coined in 1969 by R. Murray Schafer in his book *The New Soundscape* and was further developed by Schafer in later publications.
- [3] See Stepputat n.d.; de Zöete and Spies 1939; McKean 1979; Vickers 1989; Bandem and deBoer 1995; Dibia 1996; Tenzer 1998; Davies 2000, 2001 and Bruner 2004.
- [4] For further discussion of interlocking rhythmic structures in *kecak*, see Dibia 1996, 11–15. For discussion of related rhythmic structures in *gamelan beleganjur* music, see Bakan 1999, 64–8, 150–52; 2007, 95–9.
- [5] See Cooke 1998 on the influence of gamelan music on the compositional practice of McPhee and several other Western composers, including Debussy, Ravel, Messiaen, Bartók, Cowell, Britten, Poulenc, Grainger, Cage and Harrison. See also Mera 2007 for a detailed and insightful examination of original music for gamelan composed by Mychael Danna in his score for the film *The Ice Storm*.
- [6] It is likely that the inspiration to integrate a Ramayana plot into the new *kecak* dance-drama came from another form of Balinese drama, *wayang wong* (Dibia 1996, 75).
- [7] A 'Music Effected By' section in the closing credits of *Satyricon* lists Maurice Bitter, Alain Danielou, John Coast, David Lewiston and several other ethnomusicologists and ethno-recordists. Another section of the credits titled 'With Cooperation Of' lists the record companies Nonesuch, Folkways, Lyricord, Argo, La Boite á Musique, Ocora, Philips, Le Chant du Monde, Turnabout Vox, Columbia, CBS and MCA. Unfortunately, the specific source tracks and LPs are not indicated (with the exception of one) and the recordists/producers and record companies are not linked to particular productions. It should also be noted that in addition to Nino Rota, İlhan Mimaroglu, Todd Dockstader and Andrew Rudin receive co-composer credits for the film's musical score. For a relevant essay on Rota's compositional approach in Fellini's films, see Dyer 2007.
- [8] At the time of this writing, portions of the scenes from *Satyricon* discussed in this article could be accessed online at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPbYzw-sTeI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPbYzw-sTeI) (accessed January 2009).
- [9] Behr notes that Fellini's source material for this scene was not Petronius's *Satyricon*, which includes no parallel scene, but was instead likely to have been Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (Apuleius 2007, 45–54 [Chs. 2.31–3.11]; Behr n.d.).

- [10] For a very different (and much more positive) interpretation of the described episodes of *Satyricon*, see Burke 1996, 168–79. See also Bondanella 2002 and Burke and Waller 2002 on related matters of Fellini interpretation.
- [11] The original recordings of chain gangs manipulated by Burwell for these sequences were made by Alan Lomax and first released on *Negro Prison Songs* (reissued by Rounder Records on CD as *Prison Songs: Historical Recordings from Parchman Farm, 1947–48*) (Morgan 2000, 60).
- [12] E-mail correspondence, 10 May 2008. When I asked whether Fellini's use of *kecak* had influenced him or the Coens in their employment of *kecak* in *Blood Simple*, Burwell responded: 'None of us referenced the Fellini film at the time'.
- [13] The complete *Blood Simple* screenplay may be found in Coen and Coen 1988.
- [14] See also other chapters in Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000, as well as the essays in Bellman 1998, Wojcik and Knight 2001 and Slobin 2008.
- [15] See Mera 2007, 30, for related perspectives on such matters.

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