Preisner's Presence[1]

NICHOLAS REYLAND

Keele University · ✉ n.w.reyland@keele.ac.ukl

John Ellis argues that the casting of star actors in a movie "provide[s] a foreknowledge of the fiction" to come; for Richard Dyer, a "star's presence in a film is a promise."[2] Actors can accrue, in the perception of filmgoers, a stable set of associations by consistently playing certain kinds of roles (think of Isabelle Huppert), by having a recurring onscreen persona (Jack Nicholson "doing Jack") or by becoming known for extra-filmic deeds that play into one's reading of the films they inhabit (such as Christian Bale's arrest for alleged assault in the week of *The Dark Knight*'s European premiere in 2008). Associations filter interpretations of a performer's films as part of a reception process beginning long before perceivers have experienced the latest text.

In Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Three Colours* trilogy (1993–1994)—films scored by Zbigniew Preisner, whose music forms the case study for this essay—an obvious example of "presence" contributing to the films is Juliette Binoche's casting as Julie in *Blue*. Ginette Vincendeau has contrasted Binoche's filmic image to Beatrice Dalle and Sandrine Bonnaire, two

2 Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Routledge, 2004), 5; John Ellis, "Stars as a Cinematic Phenomenon" (1982), in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 6th ed., eds. Leo Braudry, Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 598. Ellis's approach also complements Dyer's semiotic theorizing of stars as clusters of signs communicating meanings to the audio-viewer in *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979).

other French actresses who emerged as stars in the 1980s. In doing so, Vincendeau incisively describes Binoche's presence:

> In comparison to Dalle's pop sexual persona (a throwback to [her role in *Betty Blue*]) and Bonnaire's earthy naturalism, Binoche's image is cooler, more cerebral, more anguished. At the same time, her distinguishing characteristic is her ability to evoke, alongside the cool exterior, the intensity of passion. One key to her success is this play on surface and depth, which has turned her into an icon of neo-romanticism. Another is her ability to shift between two feminine archetypes which seem to require French names: the *gamine* and the *femme fatale*.[3]

Cool, cerebral, anguished, playful, fatal, her surface repose masking darkness and passion: it reads like a summary of Julie. As Ellis leads one to note, however, one's knowledge of Binoche's presence inevitably colours one's reading of her individual performances. *Blue* is thus rendered cool, cerebral and anguished, for some audio-viewers, by the mere fact of Binoche's presence; her immaculate performance in *Blue*, in turn, further contributes to the formation of her onscreen persona.

Could the same be true of "star" composers? Can composers be heard to have a presence? A commercial imperative underpins such constructions. Casting a star like Binoche, who turned down *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993) to work on *Blue*, anchors not only audience expectations of content, but also studio expectations of revenue.[4] Whether or not the same is true of composers—and outside filmgoers with a specific interest in film music, it seems unlikely that many people choose to see a film merely because it features a score by a musician they admire[5]—composers are obviously "cast" by directors, producers, music supervisors and studios because their contribution can be expected to bring widely recognized qualities to a picture. One can easily think of examples where an actual star musician's presence lends a film a specific ambience: Sting's

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3 Ginette Vincendeau, "Juliette Binoche: From Gamine to Femme Fatale," *Sight and Sound* 3/12 (December 1993), 22.

4 Or, rather, it still did in the early 1990s; by 2010, franchises had arguably become the new stars.

5 The synergistic promotion of films through popular music is another matter.

songs for Mike Figgis's *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), for instance, or Miles Davis's contributions to Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (1958). It could also be argued that the cultural cachet of certain directors (and even actors) has been amplified by the recurring presence in their films of music by a preferred collaborator: think of Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann, Tim Burton (and Johnny Depp) and Danny Elfman, and, of course, Kieślowski and Preisner. How many traits commonly prized in Kieślowski's films, one might wonder, and considered benchmarks of his auteurist identity, are mediated—even generated—by the presence of Preisner's music, given their work together from 1985's *No End* to the *Three Colours* trilogy? Defining Preisner's presence, and considering its symbolic ramifications, is the purpose of the present essay, which is drawn from Chapter Two of my monograph *Zbigniew Preisner's 'Three Colors' Trilogy: Blue, White, Red. A Film Score Guide* (Scarecrow Press, 2012). While the focus of this study is limited to one composer, it is hoped that its methodology will prove useful to other scholars studying different screen music composers, and potentially to film scholars grappling with music's role in texts under scrutiny. The first section of this essay presents a theory of film music presence, drawing on theories of stardom, screen music semiotics and musical emotion; the second section explores temporality's role in evoking Preisner's presence.

The Presence of Difference

If a composer can have a presence, gauging the most notable features of its impact on audiences is made easier, in the early twenty-first century, by the "instant reception history"[6] provided by online reviewers, fansite authors and bloggers. When a composer is contracted for a score, musical

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6 Nicholas Cook, "Representing Beethoven: Romance and Sonata Form in Simon Cellan Jones's *Eroica*," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, eds. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, Richard Leppert (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 36.

characteristics are anticipated that will fit well with other components of the filmmakers' vision for a production. Those characteristics will inflect the narrative for its audiences and provide, if not foreknowledge of its content (especially as a film's original score rarely features in its trailers), then at least a cue to the film's style, themes and content. Directors, producers and audience members—including many of the film music writers one reads on the Internet—do not tend to have an expert knowledge of film music theory to call upon when making such distinctions. Nor, on the whole, do they have a stock of what Philip Tagg calls "constructional competence" in general music theory to utilize, i.e., what pedagogues term, somewhat pejoratively to those without such knowledge, "musical literacy." Tagg's term relates to the minority of people who have been educated to a high enough level, usually in a Western art music context, to describe musical sounds and their theoretical functions within that art form's specialist terminology. Such a listener is capable of hearing a diminished seventh chord and observing that (a) this is a diminished seventh and (b) the next harmony heard will probably move towards a cadential resolution. Most of the time, however, listeners (including, actually, those who are "musically literate") primarily rely not on the abstract theoretical reflections permitted by "constructional competence" but on "receptional competence" to interpret, with "quick and dirty" immediacy,[7] the expressive connotations of music.

All listeners develop a "receptional" cultural knowledge concerning music's ability to signify, for instance, non-musical ideas (like varieties of emotion, nationalities or locations). In the case of a diminished seventh chord, especially when scored as a trembling sonority to provide a further layer of signification, listeners steeped in film know that this sound

7   See Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For Tagg's work, see Philip Tagg, "Music, Moving Image, Semiotics and the Democratic Right to Know," article based on paper delivered at conference "Music and Manipulation," (Nalen, Stockholm, 18 September 1999), http://www.tagg.org/articles/sth99art.html (last accessed 19 April 2011); see also Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida, *Ten Little Tunes: Towards a Musicology of the Mass Media* (Montreal: The Mass Media Scholars' Press, 2003).

signifies moments of tension, just as in many other musical repertoires—such knowledge is intertextual and draws on the breadth of one's musical life. Further layers of expressive connotation will also be obvious to these listeners, as the musical style and gestures rendering individual realizations of such figures will, in turn, figure other kinds of affect and signification.

Tracking the "receptional denotators" used by Internet writers on film music—i.e., the visual and verbal associations their writing contains to evoke both the nature of musical sounds *or* their affects and connotations—offers a novel way to approximate the cut of a composer's presence and with it any contribution to the formation (in Michael Long's term) of one or more "expressive registers,"[8] as perceived by a wider community of filmgoers. In the context of the present study, analyzing terms used to describe Preisner's music within online discussions of his music provides intriguing results. On the one hand, the terms indicate manifest aspects of his musical presence, in terms of its most common emotional cues and other significations. On the other, if subjected to even a small amount of critical pressure, the terms reveal latent associations that listeners tend to make concerning his scoring—associations that, in turn, offer insights into perceptions of Kieślowski's cinema. Most intriguingly, Preisner's scores, and thus the Kieślowski's films in which they occur, are revealed to be saturated with commonly accepted semiotic and expressive marks of tenderness, sadness, expressivity, tragedy, the supernatural, otherness and—above all—the feminine.

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8   Michael Long, *Beautiful Monsters: Imagining the Classic in Musical Media* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008). For Long, "expressive registers" are vernacular and instantly communicative musical short hands, vital to screen music's multitudinous tasks, which "contain the established landmarks of convention" (13) and evoke clouds of interlinked signs (like science fiction/Theremin, say). Those landmarks include, alongside elements like texture, timbre and gesture type, musical units akin to style topics and Philip Tagg's "musemes" (signs explored in work discussed shortly below). This essay might be thought to identify Preisner's presence, using Long's terms, as a subset of a musical register expressing "art film" which, when deployed, provides a "trigger" (158) for audiences signaling a film's adoption of an alternative political perspective to, say, mainstream Hollywood cinema.

Table 1 shows "receptional denotators" writers used to evoke affects and qualities of Preisner's music in a sample of online reviews.[9] Merely noting the recurring terms provides a rough sketch of Preisner's presence. His music *chills*, *enchants* and *touches* his listeners; they find it *attractive*, *beautiful*, *delicate*, *elegant*, *gentle*, *hesitant*, *interesting*, *intricate*, *minimalist*, *pastoral*, *romantic*, *sad*, *sensitive*, *somber* and *unusual*. Preisner, of course, rarely scores light-hearted movies: his preference for serious dramas dealing with major themes means that, where cast, his presence reflexively intensifies perceptions of such qualities in a film and its composer's scoring. Two theoretical approaches can nonetheless help to clarify the functionality of the "meta-climate" of Preisner's presence in a film: Patrik Juslin's studies of the signification of emotion in musical performances, and Tagg's work on the manifest purposes of screen music's signifying systems and their latent ideological functions. The former indicates Preisner's ability immediately to invoke certain kinds of emotional climate, the latter his skill at taking recognized scoring clichés and utilizing, or sometimes subverting, them to aid a film in its articulation of its main ideas.

Like a person's facial expressions and body language, music wordlessly communicates information indicating different emotional states. Juslin has demonstrated experimentally how "expressive cues" (his terminology, tantalizingly, parallels a key term in film scoring)[10] including "tempo,

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9   The writings analyzed in this admittedly "quick and dirty" pilot sampling were online CD reviews of recent Preisner film score releases, all accessed on 20 January 2006: Gary Dalkin, *Effroyables jardins* and *The Last September*, for musicweb-international.com; Andrew Keech, *Aberdeen*, *The Beautiful Country* and *The Last September*, for musicfromthemovies. com; *The Beautiful Country* (anon.) for movieboulevard.co.uk. Nothing I have read elsewhere about Preisner in this type of criticism betrays the core findings of the pilot sample.

10   Patrik Juslin, "Communicating Emotion in Music Performance: A Review and a Theoretical Framework," in *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, eds. Patrik Juslin, John Sloboda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 309-340. Juslin's term "expressive cue" does not refer to the practice of scoring "film cues," although there is an obvious overlapping of the two terms' connotations deserving of a research project in its own right. In one of the experiments informing his research, Juslin asked guitarists to perform "When the Saints," keeping all pitches and durations the same but varying the music's "expressive cues" in an attempt to express different emotions.

Table 1: Receptional denotators used in sample of Preisner reviews

Atmospheric	Elegant	Intricate	Pure
Attractive	Elegant	Intricate	Refinement
Attractive	Elegant	Intricate	Restful
Attractive	Eloquent	Intriguing	Rippling
Balance(d)	Enchanting	Introspective	Romantic
Beautiful	Enchanting	Introverted	Romantic
Beautiful	Enchanting	Lovely	Romantics (one for the)
Beautiful	Enjoyable	Minimal	Sad
Beautiful	Enjoyable	Minimalistic	Sad
Beautiful	Enthralling	Minimalistic	Sadness
Captivating	Ethereal	Moody	Sensitive
Charm	Far from dreary	Morose	Sensitive
Chilling	Gentle	Moving	Short
Chilling	Gentle	Mysterious intrigue	Simple
Complex	Ghostly	(feeling of)	Slow
Complexity	Gorgeously	Never run-of-the-mill	Slow
Complicated	recorded	Otherworldly	Somber
Crystal clear	Graceful	minimalism	Somber
Curious	Haunting	Pared-down	Somberness
Darker despair	Heart-warming	Particular	Sparse
Dislocated	Hesitant	Pastoral	Spectral
Eclectic (wildly)	Hesitant	Pastoral	Touching
Deep	Highly distinctive	Perceptive	Touching
Delicate	Highly memorable	Perfection	Tuneful
Delicate	Imaginative	(arranged to)	Understated
Delicate	Immaculate	Powerful	Unusual
Delicate	Interesting	Precision (utter)	Unusual
Depth	Interesting	Pristine	Waves (feels like)

sound level, timing, intonation, articulation, timbre, vibrato, tone attacks, tone decays, and pauses" can be manipulated to signify the expression of strong emotions including tenderness (i.e., expressions of love), sadness, happiness, fear and anger:

> For example, sadness expressions are associated with slow tempo, low sound level, legato articulation, small articulation variability, slow tone attacks, and dull timbre, whereas happiness expressions are associated with fast tempo, high

sound level, staccato articulation, large articulation variability, fast tone attacks, and bright timbre[.] [11]

Surveying the receptional denotators used to describe Preisner's music, his scores appear to be dominated by sadness and tenderness expressions, rather than those for anger, fear or happiness. In turn, there are more similarities than differences between tragic and tender forms of expression, according to Juslin, including slow mean tempo, slow tone attacks, low sound levels, legato articulation, large timing variations, soft duration contrasts, slow tone attacks, and a final *ritardando* at the end of a phrase. Tenderness and sadness are differentiated, in turn, by sound level variability (small for tender, low for sadness), timbre (soft for tenderness, dull for sadness), and use of vibrato (a slow vibrato for sadness). Such fluctuations are subtle and one could imagine how film scores exploring a continuum between tenderness and sadness would anchor its precise emotional connotations with narrative specificity in relation to its full audio-visual context—although, as Juslin notes, children as young as four are able to manipulate expressive cues musically to signify alternative emotions. Together, though, these different sets of expressive cues unite in an overarching emotional bracket.

Juslin states that the "single cue combination that was most expressive according to listeners had the following characteristics (cues in order of predictive strength): legato articulation, soft spectrum, slow tempo, high sound level, and slow tone attacks," so that "the most expressive cue combination was highly similar to the cue combination that expressed sadness and tenderness best." [12] By typically expressing sadness and tenderness, Preisner's style therefore signifies expressivity itself. Juslin observes that "the so-called 'separation calls' associated with social loss"—the cries that infants (and others) make when separated from their mothers (or other loved ones and objects) by factors ranging from a lost line of sight to actual bereavement—elicit "strong sympathetic responses in listeners," [13] and he

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11 Juslin, "Communicating Emotion," 316.

12 Juslin, "Communicating Emotion," 317.

13 Juslin, "Communicating Emotion," 331, citing Robert Plutchik, *The Psychology and Biology of Emotion* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1994).

suggests that this may be why "listeners find performances with a sad expression particularly expressive."[14] Perhaps the fusion of tenderness and sadness cues, evocative of the loss of someone or something that is loved, gives such expressions their particular intensity. Many of the films Preisner has scored deal with the loss of those to whom a character feels especially tender, such as parents, children and partners. The majority of the protagonists who suffer such losses in his films are, in turn, women and children.

Some of these expressive cues have a basis in forms of vocal expression that appear to be cross-culturally wired into human behavior through evolutionary adaptations. Other cues are governed, Juslin notes, by cultural influences; cross-cultural expressive cues are also "modulated" through social experience.[15] Along this continuum of modification lies the shift from music's statistical cueing of strong basic emotions (expressive cueing) to its syntactical evocations of more complex emotions and other non-musical ideas (which one might term cultural cueing). Statistical changes, to oversimplify, alter the manner in which a melody, harmony or musical figure is presented, while syntactical alterations change the content of a melody, harmony or figure. Music's syntactical parameters (its cultural cues) are like a rudimentary sign language; its statistical elements (expressive cues) are more like body language. Tagg's work on screen music semiotics provides a productive framework for understanding the cultural cueing of generic musical figures within a given repertoire.

Grouping the terms from Table 1 into subsets suggests further nuances of Preisner's presence. For example:

> Atmospheric, Chilling, Curious, Darker, Deep, Ethereal, Ghostly, Haunting, Intriguing, Moody, Morose, Mysterious intrigue, Otherworldly, Sad, Sadness, Somber, Spectral, Unusual

These words bear connotations of the occult, metaphysical, spiritual and supernatural, and also of the tragic—concepts that go hand in hand in many cultures, where death and its inevitability, obviously, lead many to

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14 Juslin, "Communicating Emotion," 317.
15 Juslin, "Communicating Emotion," 317.

speculate on the possibility of death's transcendence through magic, re-
ligion and the occult. They invoke the possibility of a metaphysical di-
mension above and beyond concrete reality. The role of such themes
within films scored by Preisner, not least in the Kieślowski collaborations,
hardly requires emphasis here: metaphysical possibilities are among the
key concerns in *No End*, *The Decalogue* (1989), *The Double Life of Véronique*
(1991) and the *Three Colours* trilogy. Musical figures typical of Preisner's
style that evoke such cueing are identified throughout my recent mono-
graph on the *Three Colours* films, and below in this essay.

Another grouping of the "receptional denotators" used by the online
reviewers reveals the kinds of terms Tagg has revealed to be stereotypi-
cally, and somewhat problematically, regarded as musical markers of the
feminine. For example:

> Attractive, Beautiful, Captivating, Charm, Delicate, Elegant, Eloquent, Graceful,
> Intricate, Introspective, Introverted, Lovely, Pastoral, Romantic, Sad, Sensitive,
> Sparse

Through a long process of social sedimentation, such terms have come to
be associated with musical figures ("style topics") heard, typically, in as-
sociation with non-musical significations of the feminine. As Tagg argues,
"music—even without words or accompanying visuals—is capable of creat-
ing and communicating semantic fields of considerable ideological poten-
tial … manag[ing] to influence our attitudes towards such phenomena as
male, female, nature, Native Americans, etc."[16] These musical codes do
not simply work as a narrative short-hand in audio-visual texts, permitting
culturally conditioned listeners access to crucial information that might
otherwise take considerable filmic exposition. When musical sounds gain
cultural currency as clichéd significations of, for instance, what women
ideally are/should aspire to be—feminine equals attractive, beautiful and
charming, say, or pastoral, romantic and sensitive—their deployment can
be argued to shape and support systems of ideology that seek to subjugate
women into pre-fabricated models of subjectivity which benefit, primarily,

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16 Tagg, "Music, Moving Image, Semiotics."

the male beneficiaries of sexist societal hegemonies. As Tagg has proven, there is also a link between musical qualities evoking the adjectives discussed above, such as the mournful and metaphysical denotators, and those evoking the stereotypes of the second subset: together they form a meta-signifier for "female subjectivity."

Tagg's well-known analytical comparisons of perceptions of television main title themes demonstrated how, according to the world of screen music semiotics,

> women are twice as likely as men to be associated with the outdoors;
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> women are 7 times more likely than men to be related to seasons or the weather;
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> women are 12 times more rural than men;
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> women are 13 times more likely than men to be associated with quiet and calm;
>
> women are 25% more likely than men to be associated with love;
>
> women are never asocial and never carry weapons;
>
> women may often be sad, melancholic or nostalgic.[17]

Much of this is untrue; the rest is debatable. Many of the denotators used to describe Preisner's music, however, demonstrate how his music evokes similar ideas and draws on the traditions of screen music signification contributing to this situation. Tagg's experiment asked listeners to decide whether the theme tunes concerned either a male or female character, and then subjected to statistical analysis the receptional denotators test subjects invented to describe the contrasting musics. "Female" tunes were thus revealed, for instance, to be slower, more legato, more static and softer in timbre than their "male" counterparts; considering their musical characteristics alongside the visual and verbal associations made by listeners led Tagg, in turn, to hypothesize polarities of gender as expressed by mainstream screen scoring practices:

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17 Tagg, "Music, Moving Image, Semiotics."

Table 2: Philip Tagg's hypothesized dualities of male-female scoring clichés

male	*female*	male	*female*	male	*female*
fast	*slow*	sudden	*gradual*	active	*passive*
dynamic	*static*	upwards	*downwards*	outwards	*inwards*
hard	*soft*	jagged	*smooth*	sharp	*rounded*
urban	*rural*	modern	*old times*	strong	*weak*

To observe that Preisner's music shares many of the qualities and associations Tagg found to be stereotypically representative of the feminine, however, is not to say that Preisner or his collaborators are sexist. Far from it. The key critical question concerns the specific uses to which Preisner and Kieślowski put such ideas. In particular, closely analyzing the ends to which Preisner's scoring articulates such significations—and more broadly the way he deploys his presence's "meta-climate" of femininity, expressivity, tenderness and sadness—leads me to suggest that such connotations have more typically been utilized, in his work, to advance an alternative, more progressive, political agenda.

Such thematic and symbolic concerns point to another (or an Other) realm of meaning in Kieślowski's films—concerns explored in contrary motion to those of mainstream narrative cinema. Films in the classical Hollywood tradition, for instance, teach perceivers to experience the realm of magic, feelings, emotions, intimations of mortality and the innocence of childhood, and so on, as being the concerns of a particular department of the human race. From *Sunrise* (Murnau, 1927) and *Now, Voyager!* (Rapper, 1942) to *The Witches of Eastwick* (Miller, 1987) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Maguire, 2001), these matters have been branded, by music and many other filmic devices, as "women's issues." Could the Preisner-Kieślowski films, by dealing with such concerns outside of their usual "box"—and, furthermore, saturating their narratives with further audio-visual intimations thereof, such as, alongside Preisner's music, the extravagant colour-coding of the art design in the trilogy and its protagonists' lack of clear teleological goals—be argued to be an attempt to reclaim consideration of such matters for a different or more diverse audience, and for purposes other than the maintenance of a cultural status quo?

As Paul Coates has suggested, while one could read the predominantly female protagonists of the late Kieślowski films as imprinting "a world whose negativity increasingly 'feminizes'—disempowers—us all … it may also be deemed positive, with virtues culturally coded as 'feminine' … the right nostrum for many modern ills."[18] Alicja Helman goes further, arguing that the telos of Kieślowski's career can be considered a move from the cool rationality of men to the sensitivity, compassion and openness of women, with Valentine in *Red* the culmination of that process, "embodying ideal femininity":

> Kieślowski continually raises his estimate of the feminine dimension in nature and culture. The feminine is not viewed as a necessary or even valuable supplement to the masculine, but as an alternative to it. The world as women see and feel is a different one, with values that can also reveal themselves to a man, if only he divest himself of prejudices and admit new perceptions. In his last films, Kieślowski unequivocally shows women as those who "see" better, feel more deeply, and understand more fully, because they are better "equipped" to do so. They have a greater range of sensitivity, capacity for compassion and ability to open themselves to others.[19]

One might feel Helman's take on male and female minds is too rigid, but the points she and Coates make are revealing. Kieślowski's cinema was increasingly "feminized," particularly during the late Preisner collaborations, and his "feminine turn," moreover, gathered momentum as music became an increasingly prominent feature of the films. Preisner's presence therefore provides both a prompt and support to this transition in Kieślowski's cinema, and thus, moving beyond gendered readings, towards the polemical thrust of his trilogy: the moral imperative to be—in the face of everything in late modern society that compels one to desire to be otherwise—sensitive, compassionate, kind to others, and responsive to human needs beyond those of the selfish consumer.

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18   Paul Coates, "Introduction," in *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieślowski*, ed. Paul Coates (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), 6.
19   Alicja Helman, "Women in Kieślowski's Late Films," in *Lucid Dreams*, 134.

Do a wider range of films and scores trope superficially sexist filmic conventions to challenge broader cinematic and societal conventions, utilizing the musical cues as a trigger announcing a shift into this alternative "expressive register"? Films one might suggest in this context include Mike Leigh productions with Andrew Dickson's sparse scoring for harps and strings, such as *Naked* (1993), with its depiction of masculinity in crisis; the introspective and mournful music of Gustavo Santaolalla in Alejandro González Iñárritu's films or Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005); the fragile heart of *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) evoked by Clint Eastwood's cues for acoustic guitar; the delicate piano tracery of Thomas Newman's themes for the nuanced identities of the male protagonists of *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994) and *American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999). These sounds, like many of Preisner's Kieślowski cues, could be argued to demarcate fictive spaces for contestation. They subvert stereotypical musical signifiers to assert a universality of concern with "othered" realms of experience, opening them to people of diverse ages, nationalities, genders and sexualities in the service of non-mainstream visions of humanity. This is one way in which European art cinema scoring sometimes tries to epitomize a different way of life, delineating fantasy, but not fantastical, visions of society by adopting an alternative approach to Hollywood scoring. That so much of Preisner's presence is derived stylistically, as charted in my monograph on the composer, from his absorption of Polish musical influences only intensifies its potential to express difference and otherness; that so much of his presence can in turn be associated with "love" (through its expressive cueing of tenderness) renders it potently apt in films, such as the *Three Colours* trilogy or *It's All about Love* (Vinterberg, 2003), reexamining aspects of that multifaceted concept.

Preisner's scores fulfill such functions, in part, through his presence's announcement of their intention to do so. Clichés are troped, opening a realm of expectations within which the same clichés are then examined and rewritten through the telling of stories about characters removed from mainstream cinematic conventions. This is not to say that the Kieślowski collaborations are, say, barn-storming feminist or anti-capitalist tracts. Indeed, the musical moments which can at first seem most subversive—such

as Julie seizing control of the *Concert[o]* score and thus soundtrack in *Blue*—may ultimately yield to a more problematic and pessimistic perspective. But the scores and films do attempt to address the concerns of subjectivities more usually constrained, in film and in life, by cultural cliché. When they succeed, they become potentially transformative experiences for the audiences experiencing their alternative perspectives.

What musical parameters, then, are manipulated by Preisner to intimate his presence? Chapter Two of my book on Preisner explored the "constructional" foundations of the "receptional" architecture outlined above, noting ways in which Preisner's musical background filters into the most typical gestures of his music, in part by considering specific cues composed in the run-up to, but also within, the *Three Colours* trilogy. While not seeking exhaustively to pin down every "receptional denotator" associated with Preisner's style, in doing so I sought to support the argument that Preisner's music has a presence created by his career's triangulation of musical background, scoring approach and choice of collaborations. One of these foundations relates to his evocation of musical space.

Silence and Sparseness

Preisner's absence, paradoxically, is a signifier of his presence. At a macro-rhythmic level, his individual cues tend to be widely spaced across a film's narrative. While he says "I don't measure the music, it's only the function that's important," so that "[s]ometimes the score is 50 minutes, and in the next film, maybe 10,"[20] one would never expect a Preisner-scored film to have a nearly continuous soundtrack. This partly relates to the institutional contexts in which he tends to work: in place of the hyperexplicity of Hollywood films and other mainstream narrative traditions with continuous dramatic underscoring, one encounters a sparseness of music marking the film "Not-by-Hollywood" and thus flagging up its potentially

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20 Mikael Carlsson and Peter Holm, "The Double Life of Zbigniew Preisner," *Music from the Movies* (May 1997), 39.

alternative agenda, not least as art first, commerce later. But it is also an issue of personal aesthetics and compositional ability, and the novel poetics of film music that can develop in collaborations open to the unconventional. In this regard, Preisner's comments on Kieślowski's main demand for a film score is revealing: "Krzysztof always told me, 'I'm not a musician but I want music which I can breathe after,' so I tried to write music which has this sense of ease."[21] So central is this notion to Preisner's aesthetic that he has since co-opted these words as his own: "I like it when the music is breathing, and that is the most characteristic quality of my music."[22] This stylistic tenet has also been reflected in critical writing on the composer, as in Jon Paxman's discussion of how the timbre of the acoustic guitar central to *Red*'s score—strings plucked or strummed, and then reverberating while fading into silence—leads to "music that breathes, pauses, and encourages us to feel a depth of sensitivity and reflection that does not exist simply within the visual context."[23]

Not suffocating a film beneath a wall-to-wall carpet of underscoring is one way to let it breathe. Preisner extends his approach, however, to the structuring of individual cues: rests and pauses introduce breathing spaces at the microrhythmic level; he orchestrates cues in a manner creating "vertical" spaces within their sonorities; his use of reverb, delay and other studio effects creates a sense of a huge space within which his music's sounds are heard.[24] Rests breaking up the linear continuity of his cues, careful orchestrations creating an inner sparseness to his sound, and reverb adding depth of musical field are further elements shaping the spaciousness of Preisner's music. His approach to orchestration and use of reverb are discussed in my book on the composer. The following discussion

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21 In Geoffrey Macnab and Chris Darke, "Working with Kieślowski," *Sight and Sound 6/5* (May 1996), 20.

22 Carlsson and Holm, "The Double Life of Zbigniew Preisner," 39.

23 Jon Paxman, "Preisner-Kieślowski: The Art of Synergetic Understatement in *Three Colours: Red*," in *European Film Music*, eds. Miguel Mera, David Burnand (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 150.

24 Preisner ends his statement "I like it when the music is breathing …" with the explanation "[so] I like to use much reverb."

examines ways in which Preisner uses sparseness, rests and silences to inflect a film's meanings.

Examples of Preisner's wide spacing of cues are easy to find. *Decalogue* is rich in examples. For instance, after the opening cue of *1*, more than fifteen minutes pass before music is heard again; in *2*, almost fifteen minutes pass before music is heard at all. It is notable, though, that his two earliest films, *Weather Forecast* ('Prognoza pogody', Antoni Krauze, 1983) and *No End*—films that became source books for Preisner in terms of key aesthetic and stylistic elements, but also, in *No End*'s case, of raw materials to be reused in later scores—already contain this trait. *No End* contains a fascinating example of sparseness and the manner in which music that "breathes" can encourage one to feel and reflect upon things not otherwise implied by a film's discourse. As Ula frantically searches her home for photographic hints of her dead husband's increasingly enigmatic past dealings, a pair of fast, high and rising notes in the violins ring out (see Ex. 1).

Example 1: Widely spaced gestures in *No End*

The first two notes most obviously connote Ula's inner panic, as her presumed knowledge of Antek and thus of herself fragments. The strong emotion is signified through expressive cueing (cues for fear include staccato articulation, large sound variability, fast mean tempo, large timing variations and fast, shallow or irregular vibrato) and also through the cultural cueing of style topics (think of the shower scene in *Psycho*). They also create an uncanny effect thanks to their sheer isolation. No further music occurs—until, that is, the gesture repeats about sixteen seconds later. An ostinato in the cellos then begins, marking time more conventionally, and a thematic development unfolds. Up until that point, the juxtaposition

of a sudden burst of frightening music and a pronounced lack thereof has created an unsettling experience: like Ula, perceivers may experience a pang of panic at music's prolonged absence, as one expects continuation. Emotional responses are triggered, music theorists and psychologists concur, when something expected fails to happen or is delayed. As Leonard Meyer explained it, "[a]ffect or emotion-felt is aroused when an expectation—a tendency to respond—activated by the musical stimulus situation, is temporarily inhibited or permanently blocked."[25] Within Preisner's tense silences, however, one can also reflect on what has occurred. In turn, this may intensify the emotional experience. One might invest *No End*'s spaces, for instance, with anxieties for Ula, or *Blue*'s blackouts and ellipses with empathy for Julie. An experiential conduit is thereby formed, the perceivers' immediate and more reflective emotional experiences becoming proximate to the experiences of a protagonist.[26]

The cue from *No End* blurs the border between widely spaced yet separate cues and the other type of musical breathing Preisner introduces, both between and within the phrases of his scoring, by means of rests and pauses. The spaces within *Weather Forecast*'s most striking cue make the music sound, retrospectively, entirely Preisner-like; arguably, this was the cue in which he found his voice on film. Yet they also make a key contribution to the film's most poetic and moving sequence. There are pauses between phrases during which, again, the audio-viewer has time to feel suspense and reflect on the meanings of the scene. The escaping OAPs, some high on heroin following an encounter with a hippie commune, are floating in boats on a mist-shrouded river. The symbolism of these images is enticing. Aside from the obvious association of a Styx--like passage to the afterlife, the stoic grace and beauty of their weathered faces is a thing to behold. Preisner's cue consists of two elements: a high mist of string harmonics, looping like a Mellotron chord, and beneath it,

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25 See Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 31.

26 Unsettlingly, when the cue returns a few minutes later, the shrieking violins underscore the young English reporter's noisy orgasm as Ula seeks something more mysterious than sexual gratification from their liaison.

scored for what sounds like a plucked violin and a dulcimer (a combination heard in Polish traditional music), a bewitching melody. Plaintive and faltering, it develops by transposition and subtle changes to the patterns formed by the interlocking melodies of its instrumentation.

Spaces are evoked in at least four ways. First, there is the registral space between the high string harmonics and the melody, the latter scored in mid-register; second, there is an evocative friction between the A♭ triad in the harmonics and the exploration of a melody rooted in C minor, with the sustaining Gs in the melody, in particular, rubbing up against the A♭ s (Preisner's favorite intervallic tension, 5–♭6); third, the melody's pitches, once struck or plucked, resonate then fade; fourth, there are extended pauses between the already rhythmically faltering melodic phrases (see Ex. 2). Most compositionally intriguing is the close of the cue, where the rests within the melodic phrases themselves start to expand and the tune becomes atomized. One or two pitches at a time, fret work and figuration embellish the melody, but simultaneously the melodic phrases float apart, like a boat slipping its mooring. The increasing spaces heighten tension; they also permit the audio-viewer to attend to other aspects of the scene (such as the close-ups). The score evokes a sense of magic, fragility and sadness; more strongly interpreted, one might hear the increasing musical spaces as a symbol of freedoms being attained by the ageing fugitives.

Example 2: Melody on the lake from *Weather Forecast*

Antek's opening monologue in *No End* ("I died four days ago") is sculpted by Preisner's cue to sound like a recitative. Developing out of the initial statement of the "Holy God" *cantus firmus* during the film's opening, the somber continuation of the cue for low brass makes space for his speech registrally, literally scoring under his tenor, and through Preisner's use of long rests. The composer's faltering melody—limping along with a ratio of two parts music, one part silence that *Blue* later revisited—accommodates, and thus accentuates, the dead man's monologue. This is a personal version of a solution many composers for film have developed: making space for voices in the manner of a recitative and by not blending, say, male voices with mid-register instruments where the frequencies of their pitches might mask one another. The style of the cue also reminds one, however, that this kind of monodic unison, sung in octaves and separated by reverberant rests, is similar to the religious songs Preisner heard in the churches of his youth.

When the same melody returns in *Blue* as that film's funeral march, the gaps resonate with loss in other ways, not least when visually amplified by Julie's blackouts—visuals that pause with the music in an extreme intensification of this practice. *White* and *Red* contain other examples, however, such as Karol's clarinet peasant theme, the rests within which remind one that, alongside popular devotional music from Poland, its secular folk musicians also play on meter in unpredictable ways. Similarly, *Red*'s return to the "Van den Budenmayer" song first heard in *Decalogue 9* contains extra beats of rest at the end of each bar, subtly disrupting the metrical flow into a jagged edge mirroring the shards of broken glass on which the camera alights, encouraging one to consider their combined intimations of fragmentation and loss.

When asked by journalists why he includes so many silences in his music, Preisner likes to joke that he uses them to call his agents and check his accounts. Speaking to me in more serious vein, he explained his debt to Christian mystic and philosopher Simone Weil, who wrote that "[t]he central point of music is the silence which separates a rising from a falling movement," a combination leading to a "spiritual rising" and "the para-

dise for which every soul yearns."[27] Elsewhere she writes as follows: "The cry of the Christ and the silence of the Father together make the supreme harmony, that harmony of which all music is but an imitation. ... The whole universe ... is only the vibration of that harmony."[28] A key inspiration of her musings, in Preisner's reading thereof, was the notion that silence can be powerful but must be carefully prepared and then succeeded. It is also a matter of the proportion between musical elements, and then between music and other aspects of a filmic discourse. If every moment is scored, there can be no sense of foreground and background: no perspective. Intriguingly, given Weil's motivations for her interest in silence, reflections on the meanings of Preisner's silences in the literature also take a religious turn.[29]

Discussing the prominence of reverb in Preisner's music, Paxman suggests that, in *Red*, "the pervasive reverb ... suggests the resonances associated with religious buildings, such as churches and temples, and it consequently helps assert the mysterious, metaphysical undertones of both the musical themes and the subject matter itself."[30] For Srajan Ebaen, "[a] certain minimalism and precision of expression" in his scores "[turns] feelings inward into deeper, emptier realms of perception where one encounters the presence of holiness, spirit and serenity."[31] Ebaen then compares Preisner's sound to the spiritual and musical spaces shaped within Jan Garbarek and the Hilliard Ensemble's fusion of plainsong and jazz improvisation on the album *Officium* (ECM, 1994). Most intriguingly, Audrey Ekdahl Davidson links Preisner's control of time in his music to Messiaen,

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27 Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2004), 605.

28 Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks* (London: Routledge, 1998 [1957]), 199.

29 Moments when the soundtrack is genuinely silent between phrases of a Preisner cue are few and far between. *Blue* contains examples of sound design and dialogue ceasing, but even here the music's reverb sustains sonorities between musical statements.

30 Paxman, "Preisner-Kieślowski," 156.

31 Srajan Ebaen, "Zbigniew Preisner: *Requiem for My Friend*," *soundstage.com* (May 1999), http://www.soundstage.com/music/reviews/rev126.htm (last accessed 19 April 2011).

Górecki, Pärt, Tavener and other composers since 1900 who have manipulated music's temporal dimension to explore spiritual and religious themes. The result is music, as she puts it, which rejects "the modern pressure of time … in a way returning to an essentially medieval sense of the temporal, which held that time is contained within eternity and is dependent on God at every moment." Her analysis of Messiaen's striving to "create a music that takes the listener into a realm of the imagination beyond the usual considerations of time as he or she encounters them in the workaday world" seems particularly apposite when considering Preisner in the context of his metaphysically inclined collaborations with Kieślowski.[32] The spaces formed between and within the cues of a Preisner score may not have pretences to the eternal, but they do fashion, in a sense, the sonic architecture of chapel-like spaces within a narrative. Preisner is continuously building moments within which the perceiver might take refuge and reflect on what one has seen and heard, rather than rushing headlong into the next haze of meaning. The experience of hearing music reverberating in the sacred spaces of his youth leaves an imprint on film scores that open the possibility of a similar experience of reflection, mystery and perhaps even enlightenment for the audio-viewer. In turn, this contributes musically to one of the most intriguing Kieślowski-Preisner projects: their construction of a site for serious spiritual reflection in the cinema.

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ABSTRACT

Preisner's Presence

How many hallmarks of Krzysztof Kieślowski's auteurist identity are mediated—even generated—by the presence of Zbigniew Preisner's typically sad, tender, sparse and haunting music in the films they created together from 1985's *No End* to the *Three Colours* trilogy in 1993–1994? Do famous film composers have "star presence" akin to the star power of famous actors, and, if so, in what ways do these presences shape our cinematic experiences? This essay seeks to define and explore Preisner's presence and its symbolic ramifications. The first section outlines my theory of film music presence, drawing on a range of work on stardom (Richard Dyer), screen music semiotics (Philip Tagg) and musical emotion (Patrik Juslin); the second section explores temporality's role in evoking Preisner's presence. While the focus of this study is limited to one composer, its methodology should prove useful to other scholars studying different screen music composers. More generally, the essay provides an introduction to theories of emotion and semiotics that can be highly productive to screen music analysis.

KEYWORDS Zbigniew Preisner, Krzysztof Kieślowski, *Three Colours*, film music

STRESZCZENIE

Obecność Preisnera

Ileż cech charakterystycznych tożsamości autorskiej Krzysztofa Kieślowskiego znajduje się pod wpływem obecności muzyki Zbigniewa Preisnera (lub nawet wprost z niej wypływa) — muzyki zwykle smutnej, delikatnej, oszczędnej i zapadającej w pamięć, którą można usłyszeć w filmach stworzonych wspólnie przez Kieślowskiego i Preisnera, od *Bez końca* z 1985 do trylogii *Trzy kolory* z lat 1993–1994? Czy sławni kompozytorzy muzyki filmowej są tak wyraziści jak sławni aktorzy? A jeśli tak, to w jaki sposób ta ich wyrazista obecność kształtuje nasze doświadczenia kinowe? Celem eseju jest próba zdefiniowania i zbadania obecności Preisnera oraz jej konsekwencji symbolicznych. W pierwszej części przedstawiam swoją teorię obecności muzyki filmowej, odwołując się do prac poświęconych statusowi gwiazdy (Richard Dyer), semiotyce muzyki filmowej (Philip Tagg) oraz muzycznym emocjom (Patrik Juslin); w części drugiej rozważam rolę czasu w ewokowaniu obecności Preisnera. Choć niniejsza praca skupia się na jednym kompozytorze, jej metodologia powinna być przydatna innym badaczom zajmującym się innymi kompozytorami muzyki filmowej. W szerszym aspekcie esej jest wprowadzeniem do teorii emocji i semiotyki, które mogą być niezwykle przydatne w analizie muzyki filmowej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Zbigniew Preisner, Krzysztof Kieślowski, *Trzy kolory*, muzyka filmowa