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## **The Unbearable Lightness of Being: Alan Splet and the Dual Role of Editing Sound and Music**

**Liz Greene**

Alan Splet was born on the 31 December 1939. He grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. With a keen interest in classical music, he played the cello and was involved in amateur radio. After qualifying as an accountant, he turned his back on this career and pursued his lifelong love of film sound and music. He worked with David Lynch on the short film *The Grandmother* (1970) and continued to work with Lynch and such directors as Carroll Ballard, Peter Weir, and Philip Kaufman, up until his death in 1994. Here, I shall discuss his collaboration with Kaufman on *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988).

On Kaufman's movies, Splet was credited as the sound designer and music editor, a very unusual combination as these were normally very distinct roles. Kaufman knew of Splet's passion for music and entrusted him with this dual responsibility. It led to an interesting collaboration where sound and music were conceived together early in the production process. Splet was given a unique opportunity as a sound designer to forge a significant interaction between all elements of the soundtrack and to develop his own creativity on this film.

In assessing Splet's contribution to sound and music in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, I shall consider the merits of having one person oversee its sound design in this film. My sources include interviews with key personnel who worked with Splet and written and sound material in a library that holds Splet and his partner Ann Kroeber's sound effects and notes, the *Sound Mountain* archive. I shall consider how various elements of the soundtrack, the use of music, voice, and sound effect work within the film. For the sound effects I will focus specifically on the sounds of birds, tanks, and camera shutters. Finally, I shall give a close textual analysis of one scene to illustrate the merits of having one person oversee the postproduction sound.

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, adapted from the novel of the same name by Milan Kundera, tells the story of Tomas (Daniel Day Lewis), a brain surgeon living in Prague, his relationship with Tereza (Juliette Binoche), a sexually inexperienced woman who later becomes his wife, and his ongoing affair with Sabina (Lena Olin), an artist. Set against the backdrop of late 1960s Prague, the Stalinist control of Czech society is keenly highlighted throughout. The film, unlike the book, follows a linear narrative of traditional trajectory, only some freeze-frames, taken from Tereza's perspective as a photographer, disrupt this flow. Kundera's novel, on the other hand, centers more on philosophical musings than on narrative. For this reason, many considered that the book would be unfilmable (Fellows 1992, 75).

### **Voice: Accent and Walla**

The issue of accent was critical to the film because none of the main actors was Czech, and the characters in the film spoke English. The cast were from a variety of countries, and the many did not speak English as a first language. Kaufman (2006b) describes the decision made for all the actors to have a similar accent: "You will notice when Daniel Day Lewis speaks that he has a Czech accent. We felt that with the great international cast that if everyone had a matched accent or somewhat matched that they would all seem to be a part of the same movie." This choice is effective because without any semblance of similarity to the accent it would have been distracting for audiences. There was one dialogue coach and one Czech language coach working on the film.

The use of English as the spoken language by American filmmakers in representing non-English-speaking countries can be problematic. An accusation of cultural imperialism can be lobbed at the filmmakers, but in this case, particularly due to the film being shot during the late 1980s, it would have been impossible for Kaufman to make the film inside Czechoslovakia. It would have been even more difficult to find enough Czech actors living in exile who could have been cast for the significant roles. Within the political context of the day, the uniformity of accent seems a reasonable compromise both politically and dramatically.

These voices were often placed in hushed scenes. A significant factor in the soundtrack to be considered was the quietness evidenced on the streets of Prague. Kaufman (2006a) describes the paranoia he experienced in the city:

Prague when I visited was a city of deep silences. The main streets were hushed, people hurried. Even though they were crowded the streets were quiet. There was a somber oppressive atmosphere. Occasionally somebody would whisper to you about changing money, but I've never been on huge streets like that, that were so quiet. There was a definite silence that had come to Prague. Everybody was afraid to

Speak openly. You would be in restaurants, way over in the corner of the restaurant with a few people and everybody who lived in Prague would be afraid to even whisper knowing that the place was bugged and the table was bugged. Even in taxi cabs people were being afraid, people were afraid to speak because everybody could get into trouble.

The soundscape created by Splet needed to reflect those silences but also infuse the atmosphere with real Czech voices. Kroeber informed me that they did a swap with some Soviet filmmakers for sound effects to use in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In the *Sound Mountain* archive, there are also recordings of Czech walla of teachers with children playing and singing in a schoolyard (see figure 1, which is from the *Sound Mountain* archive). Walla is the term used to describe the sound of people speaking in the background of a film; it can be either people having real conversations or people just talking nonsense, as it would be indecipherable in the recording. These hushed voices and distant traffic sounds created the relative silent ambience of Prague. This attention to the voice was needed to reflect the political and social tensions of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	1/4"	Take	Comments	Royalty
Walla children	Czech	playing outside	1	1	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Walla, children. Czech children walla & playing (ext.) Woman's voice (teacher?) seems to be guiding children occasionally. Many usable pieces.	
Walla children	Czech	singing, laughing & walla	1	2	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Walla, children, Czech. Children singing & lt. walla w/occ. woman interjecting. Boy giggles c/u. Children laughing w/room reverb.	
Walla children	baby	crying SR# 1877	2	1	S N/M 15 ips. Walla, children. Baby crying in distance (BAI-11).	
Walla children	playground		2	2	S N/M 15 ips. Walla, children; playing in playground. Distant reverbed sound (NCW, Mics. # 39-1) Atlin B.C.	
Walla children	street or courtyard	playing	2	3	S N/M 15 ips. Walla, children; playing in street or courtyard. Reverbed; (S/I 1007-32) 2X.	
Walla children	street or courtyard	playing	2	4	S N/M 15 ips. Walla, children; playing in street or courtyard. Reverbed; (S/I 1007-01).	

Figure 1. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*—Czech walla from the *Sound Mountain* archive.

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## Sound Effects

### Birds

A significant section of sound effects listed in the *Sound Mountain* archive catalog for *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are of bird recordings. Twenty-nine birds are listed, including the American golden plover, black-bellied plover, blackbird, black oyster catcher, chaffinch, collared turtle dove, corn bunting, crow, cuckoo, doves, house sparrow, jay, killdeer, laysan albatross, long-billed curlew, magpie, mistle thrush, nightingale, owl, pigeon, redwing, robin, skylark, sparrow, starling, swallow, turtle dove, whimbrel, and willow warbler. These birds were recorded in eight countries—Czechoslovakia, England, France, Holland, Scotland, Spain, the United States, and Wales—and came from four different catalogs—BBC, Cinesound, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Splet's own recordings from the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland. They were made at different times of the year and date from as far back as 1963 and up to 1987. The birds were recorded in various settings: forest, country, hedgerow, town, city, suburban, and park. The time of day was often specified along with the season in which the recording was made. The recordings were detailed as coming from single birds and groups of birds with "good solos," "raucous chirping" and "cawing and chatter," "distant with good reverb," "chorus of large colony," and "cooing in loft and eaves."

The sound of pigeons cooing is used in the scene when Tomas visits Tereza's small town. Recordings of these birds are *worldized* (a term coined by Walter Murch to describe a sound recorded or created in studio or elsewhere that is then treated so that it sounds as if it is heard in another acoustic location). Here, the sound is removed from the inside loft and eaves setting where the birds were originally recorded, and made to sound as though they are outside and on the ground. The sound effects editor, Richard Hymns, then looped these recordings (see figure 2 from the *Sound Mountain* archive). Aligning Tereza with the birds was an idea carried over from the novel, sonically revealing an intimacy and connection with Tomas. Much later in the film, birds can be heard at the countryside farm, but only the cooing of the pigeons represents the urban space of Prague. Extensive use of library material was required for the birds in the film, amounting to nine edited ¼-inch reels of bird sounds. This is just one area of the catalog that indicates the extensive lengths Splet went to create the right sound and mood on each occasion.

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Birds ambience	city ambience	pigeons	2	9	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Bird ambience. city. Pigeons cooing in loft or eaves; could work for pigeons on ground (hymns loops).
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Figure 2. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*—birds, pigeons from the *Sound Mountain* archive.

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The opening shot of the film required the sound of pigeons to be mixed with the sound of a laughing couple as they have sex and the sound of distant bells tolling. All of these sounds are asynchronous and off screen; visually all that can be seen is the beige wall of a building. What is achieved is an intimacy forged by the sound mix. The lovers are never seen. Kaufman (2007) describes Splet's requirements for the bird sound:

Suddenly he said, "These won't do, these are American doves, I need those European doves." So suddenly

everybody was alerted. I think Alan, my son Peter, we explored all through Europe and got essentially Czech doves to be in the background. They were definitely different than the little American doves that we see around here, and they were sexier.

Splet had spent time in Scotland and England, had heard the sound of European pigeons, and had brought this knowledge to the film. The sound of the pigeons used in the film came from a European sound effects library, and this was used instead. There is sonic warmth to the cooing of the pigeons that does suggest an intimacy that Splet considered was lacking in the recording of the other birds. Splet realized he needed this sound mixed with that of the couple in order to evoke the appropriate atmosphere. This intimacy was important to capture from the outset because Splet needed to establish a warmth in this sexual encounter. It is never revealed who is behind the wall: presumably Tomas is with a woman, and perhaps it is Sabina. The closeness in their relationship and sexual encounters differs from how he behaves around other women. With them, Tomas comes across as a cold womanizer. Only Tereza manages to attain a similar intimate relationship with him. What may seem like a minor element in the film was given significant attention because of the emotional impact needed from the sound effect.

## Sound Effects

### *Tanks*

Another significant section in the archive is the sound of tanks, which are central to the invasion scene. Before this scene, Tomas and Tereza argue in their apartment. This is a relatively quiet scene compared with what is to follow. Within this quietness, Splet is able to introduce subtle sounds. The clinking of glasses and distant low rumblings sonically suggest that something ominous is approaching. An understanding of the dynamic range of sound is essential to create this effect. The volume of the sound in the apartment needs to be at a low level so that one can hear this exterior presence. Moreover, placing one noisy loud scene after a relatively quiet scene increases the dramatic impact of the later louder sound. It becomes more shocking having come from quietness assaulting the senses. Splet would have wanted audiences to be shocked by the invasion, and this is one way in which sound contributes to this tension.

The invasion scene was edited together from archival footage from various sources and with the fictionalized dramatic action, which was shot specifically for the film. Murch in conversation with Michael Ondaatje (2002) explained the arduous process of cutting these elements together:

[T]here was easily forty hours of documentary material about the Soviet invasion of Prague, scattered all over the world. The challenge was to collect and distill that material, and it was a crazy quilt of textures; some of it was in color, some of it was shot in 16 millimetre, some of it had been copied thirty times, some was original 35 millimetre black-and-white negative. We had to find a way to integrate our story into that footage—to have the two characters move through it—and tell the entire story of the invasion in twelve minutes; and we had to get into that footage from a film that had a very different 'undocumentary' texture and very stylized look, and also to get out of it at the other end and back into the story in an interesting way, and not leave the audience with the sense that this was an aberration or an intrusion. (131)

This editing sequence was exemplary because it married archive and dramatic footage together, weaving the narrative through these layers of story. The sound was in the main created in postproduction, and likewise it needed to bring the audience along and make the invasion seem authentic. The sound had to seem consistent throughout the scene, creating the illusion of reality. There was perhaps one original sound that was used from the invasion, Murch (2008) notes:

There was one sound of a crowd yelling in Wenceslas Square. A very big crowd. But I don't know what library it came from. I think we used it in the film, mixed with other crowd sounds. It was technically not very well recorded, but it was authentic and gave us a sense of what it must have sounded like if one had really been there.

The sounds of the crowd would have been built around this original recording. Splet and his sound effects editors created various sounds that were mixed together to build this soundscape.

In an interview Kroeber, told me that she created some of these tank sounds by placing her specially commissioned FRAP (Flat Response Audio Pickup) contact microphone onto a piece of Plexiglas. While in England, in the early 1980s and during the making of David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), Kroeber saw a drummer and guitarist playing on a BBC program. She was impressed by the fact that the guitar had a contact microphone on it but the drums could not be heard. This isolation of the guitar sound without any background noise inspired Kroeber to use this approach to record sound effects. Arnie Lazarus, who made these contact microphones, was based in San Francisco. On returning home to San Francisco, Kroeber contacted Lazarus and had him build her a custom microphone. Tweaking the microphone took approximately three months, but eventually Kroeber (2001) got a microphone that was very sensitive, but also sturdy

enough to record sound effects. This FRAP microphone enabled Kroeber to record sound in a non-traditional manner; she said it felt as if the microphone was picking up the sound from the inside.

For the invasion scene, Kroeber (2005) ran some nuts and bolts over the Plexiglas, and the contact microphone picked up this sound as one much bigger than it seemed. The rumbling sound recorded from the nuts and bolts aurally represents the sound of the tanks moving on the cobblestones of Prague's streets (see figure 3 from the *Sound Mountain* archive).

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	1/4"	Take	Comments	Royalty
Tank Sweetner			2	2	S N/M 15ips. Tank sweetner. Heavy machine. No dolby.	
Tank sweetner		treads	2	3	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Tank sweetner. 2 beeps: tank treads crushing gravel.	
Tank sweetner		treads	2	4	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Tank sweetner. 3 beeps: tank treads crushing gravel.	
Tank sweetner		treads	2	5	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Tank sweetner. 4 beeps: tank treads crushing gravel.	
Tank sweetner		treads	2	6	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Tank sweetner. Heavy tread crushing grit, stones & glass in street. (Frap, grit/ glass #1-15 @ 3 3/4).	
Tank sweetner		treads	2	7	M (2 trk) N/M 15 ips. Tank sweetner. Medium tread crushing grit, stones & glass in street. (Frap grit/ glass # 1-15 @ 7 1/2). Best near end of take.	

Figure 3. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*—tank sweetener, bottom two FRAP recordings, from the *Sound Mountain* archive.

Hymns (2007) created another sound in this invasion scene. He notes his role working under Splet:

Creating the sounds was Alan's forte. He did most of that exclusively. I was often involved in the recording & manipulating of those sounds but rarely had time to create much. Anything I did create was very much under the watchful eye of Alan. I remember on the Invasion of Prague . . . I had to create a tank "skid." Walter Murch mixed the scene and asked me how I had made it. I had put my wife on a shovel and then tried to drag it, giving it a short steely skid sound. I then manipulated it until it had the "weight." There were a few things like that but mostly I was an editor of sound effects made by Alan or sounds pre-existing in a library.

New recordings and library sounds were manipulated to create the sound of the invasion. In the *Sound Mountain* archive, there are three reels of close-up tanks, two reels of distant tanks, and two reels of sweetener tanks. *Sweetener* refers to sounds that have been processed and manipulated. The creative input of sound in this scene serves the picture, and in turn, the edited scene gels together into a cohesive whole. Each aspect of filmmaking works together here to recreate the invasion of Prague.

The other significant sonic element in the invasion of Prague scene is the use of music. The folk song "Joj, Joj, Joj," sung here by Jarmila Sulakova, is very poignant at this point in the film. This song comes in as Tereza is photographing two dead bodies being covered over by the Czechoslovakian flag. The music fades out after about fifty seconds, to be replaced by the bells ringing around Wenceslas Square, and then we see and hear the people marching to the sound of the Czechoslovakian National Anthem. The integration of sound design and music is indicative of the approach taken throughout the film: these folk elements continue subtly through the music of the Czechoslovakian composer Leos Janáček.

## Music

### *Classical*

In adapting the book, Kaufman made a key decision to replace the central narrative voice with music. Kaufman (2006b) notes,

We couldn't use the most interesting character in the book, which is the narrator, that is to say Kundera himself. I have always felt that narrators tend to flatten the screen. Instead of Kundera's voice actually we used the music of Janáček, Kundera's favorite composer.

Kundera, who played an important role as a consultant in the adaptation process, suggested the music of Janáček, a composer with whom his father had studied. The music of Janáček is mentioned in Kundera's novel (1984, 97), but it is not as dominant as the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, which excites Tereza, and she later induces this love of Beethoven in Tomas (32).

Kaufman decided to work with Splet to create the sound design (which is the only role Splet had performed up until this point) for the film and also gave him full responsibility for the music. He wanted Splet to create the music track from preexisting scores and recordings. Splet was initially reluctant to work as a music editor. Kaufman recalls,

Alan was very sharp and had a critical eye and you could never push Alan into some area that he did not want to go into because he always had to feel things. . . . Suddenly, Alan was into it and leading the attack and Alan really would spend night and day listening to . . . all these Janáček simple solo pieces, the Janáček symphonic movements. And he was so good with music that he could slide a few notes out so that nobody could detect what he had done. Which is essentially what a music editor would do to a composer's score but Alan sort of entered into the dream. (Kaufman 2007)

It took some time for Splet to come around to this role as music editor, but once he trusted the process and his abilities to do the job well, he worked day and night to get the best possible music tracks for the film. Everybody I interviewed who had worked with Splet mentioned that he had a very clear artistic vision of what he wanted and why he wanted it. He was open to changing his mind, but as Kaufman states here, he would not just do something because the director asked him to do it.

Kaufman (2006b) explains one of his reasons for using Janáček's music: "We find in Janáček smaller pieces a kind of a voice that's almost a conversational voice. That can carry some of the narrative that links both the romantic and the antiromantic." Whereas the preexisting Janáček music and performances were selected by Kundera, Kaufman and Splet and took a long time to sift through in order to create the mood and narrative for the film. The romantic and antiromantic

tendencies in the music were incorporated into the narrative to emphasize the mood of the film. This is a difficult selection process because the music is needed to convey both the intellectual and emotional elements of the film. As the music was already written, performed, and recorded, the selections had to then cut with the picture, which also had a lengthy editing process. Walter Murch (2006b), the editor on the film, explains the difficulties involved here:

In advance of assembling a scene, I think it is a big mistake for me, at any rate, to use preexisting music and to have the visual material dependant on what the music says should be done. I like to have the dynamics go in the opposite direction. So that the scene dictates what kind of music would be chosen. Once that decision has been made, however, the catchword for me is "always expect miracles."

Splet worked for a long period getting the Janáček music to fit with the picture. The performances of Janáček's music, which had been written and performed many years before the novel was written or the film was made, weave in and around the characters and scenes of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

This collaborative process involving writer, director, editor, and music editor/sound designer was essential in creating a music track that would last to the final cut of the film. Usually, prerecorded music is used as a temporary track (or *temp music*) but gets replaced when the composer delivers the score. This is not what was intended for *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Murch (2005) explains the work Splet produced:

Alan supervised the sound effects and cut all of the sound effects and also uniquely cut all of the music for it. . . . That presents a whole other realm of difficulties because it's not unusual to cut music from prerecorded sources; that's essentially what temp music is for in films. But it never gets carried to the final stage—which is, we are actually going to use this music—or rarely does. This was an entire film that was scored from prerecorded music so it had to really stand up to scrutiny in a way that temp music doesn't. . . . [B]ecause of the nature of the book from which it was adapted and the kind of film that it was when it was shot, [it] had to have a solidity and a thoroughness to it that temp tracks normally never achieve. So it was a huge undertaking and he did it brilliantly. He would play stuff for me, you know, "Come and listen to this," and I would be almost always just flabbergasted with what he was able to do. . . . I think there was one reel that I did the premixing of the sound effects on in the invasion, which was a section that I had a very particular approach to the sound on. Otherwise everything was in Alan's hands.

As Murch said, Splet created a music track out of preexisting scores that goes beyond what a music editor would generally be required to do, and he did this while working full time as the sound designer for the film. I provide an analysis of this music editing later.

### *Rock 'n' Roll*

Apart from Janáček's music, which was used in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, there was also some rock 'n' roll, and this choice has interesting implications for the narrative of the film. The first use occurs when Tereza is taking photographs on the streets of Prague. As a tram enters the frame, The Beatles "Hey Jude," sung by the Czech singer Marta Kubišová, fades up. This song is mixed with the urban soundscape of Prague and the sound of Tereza taking photographs. The music continues as Tereza is seen at home developing photos in her darkroom. Tomas sneaks a peak around the curtains, and Tereza pulls them tightly shut. The pull of the curtain is the cutting point for the music. Aligning Tereza with this song and the female singer illustrates how she represents a younger, nonconformist generation in Prague.

In the next scene, Tomas and Tereza are out celebrating with Sabina and Tomas's work colleagues. They attend a concert where a live band, Golem, is performing and young people are up dancing to a rendition of Buddy Holly's 1957 hit "That'll Be the Day." At a table close by, some older Communist Party members and their Russian comrades are sitting, drinking and talking. Tomas and his friends in hushed conversation call each one of the Party members "scoundrels," but raise their glasses to return a salute to them. Tomas tells the story of Oedipus and draws analogies between the ancient Greek myth and the Stalinist occupation of Czechoslovakia. He is encouraged by his colleagues to have this story published. At this point, it becomes clear that the table of Communist Party members are not happy with the music, and one of them instructs the band to play an old Russian folk song. The band complies. The table of bureaucrats stand up and sing along to the song. While this is going on, Jiri (Tomek Bork) discusses how the Stalinists have "manipulated" the people as we see the band adhering to the Party members wishes. The dance floor clears, and booing can be heard. After a few moments, the band changes the tempo of the music and get the crowd back onto the dance floor. By changing the tempo, the song transitions into the Seekers' "The Carnival Is Over," which was released in 1965, which has the same tune as the folk song. This action infuriates the Party members, who walk out, while Tereza and Jiri join in the dancing. Murch (2006b) outlines the timing difficulties implicit in this sequence:

That change you hear in the music is something that was intended by the screenplay. The point where this



kind of lugubrious theme in the background suddenly becomes rock 'n' roll coincides with the concept of morality. Exactly how it got worked out is something that was dependent on how those three elements coincided: both the music lasting exactly as long as it should last, given how long the people took to say what they had to say. It's easy for any of those things to overshoot each other and for the stuff to not actually happen at the same time.

This was a well-planned scene, as Murch notes, and the critical timing of the sequence indicates the changing politicization of Tomas's group with the reintroduction of rock 'n' roll and a refusal to listen to the establishment's version of the tune. It represents the casting off of an old, outdated order, in favor of a form of personal expression and freedom. This use of music works well at highlighting the differences between the old guard and the concerns of the younger generation prior to the invasion. My focus on Splet's ability to weave these musical numbers into the drama highlights the importance of subtle music editing in his soundtracks. Music is highly significant throughout the film, which I will return to later.

### **Musical Motifs and Shutter Slaps: Tereza and Sabina**

Considering the interrelationship between sound effect and music, I will present a close textual reading of the scene that has the photographic shoot of Tereza and Sabina. A number of issues are at play here: outlining how and when these sound and music elements come to the fore will prove insightful, signifying how they drive the narrative forward and provide the emotional impact within the scene.

To assess the music more fully in this scene, it is important to step back to consider the previous thirty-second scene with Tereza on the telephone. While in her own apartment, Tereza is photographing a two-pronged cactus. She takes two shots and then puts the camera down. She is frustrated with the job, and at the point where she mutters under her breath "naked women," an ominous-sounding musical motif begins. Tereza picks up the camera again to continue photographing the cactus. Her dog is playing around the coffee table. She is interrupted by the ringing of her telephone. She answers the phone, saying, "Yes. Oh it's you, yes!" Then this scene cuts to Sabina answering her door to meet Tereza.

The music, a piano motif, is an extract from Janáček's "In the Mist, II: Molto Adagio." It recurs three more times within this and the next scene, sometimes lower in volume or higher and lower in pitch. The music is used to punctuate the emotion of the scene. In many ways, this is similar to how Splet would normally have used a sound effect in a film soundtrack.

The piano motif is repeated over the editing bridge of this scene at a more amplified volume. Sabina says, "What?" to which Tereza responds, "Some woman said that I should do some nude shots." Tereza's voice is muffled, and Sabina teases her pronunciation of the word "nude." Sabina asks, "Nude shots?" Tereza repeats, "Nude shots," looking down, with an embarrassed laugh. Sabina rearranges her hat and finally takes it off, saying, "For that, we better have a drink first." This last phrase is accompanied again by the piano motif.

Sabina leads Tereza into her apartment. Sabina walks over and picks up a bottle from the shelf, ordering Tereza to "take a glass." They have a drink together, Sabina clinks Tereza's glass, and Tereza salutes her without saying anything. Tereza gulps down her drink. Sabina breaks the silence and asks, "How is Tomas?" Tereza says, "Fine," but then asks Sabina, "Haven't you seen him?" Sabina answers, "No." The musical motif comes in again for the fourth and final time. There is an awkward moment between the two women before Sabina begins to undress. The crackling fire can be heard in the apartment and some traffic in the distance. Tereza concentrates on winding her film in the camera. She removes her jacket.

Sabina gets up and fully undresses in the bedroom section, which is curtained off from the living area of her apartment. As Tereza stands up, the main musical score for the scene fades in. The camera holds on Tereza as she approaches Sabina. This music is an edited piece from Janáček's "Sonata for Violin and Piano, IV: Adagio." Splet here has compiled four sections of the music and edited them together; the piece uses mainly the piano sections to build the score, eliminating the violin sections. I cut this music together from the original soundtrack CD and was surprised to see how these different sections work so well together as a cohesive score within the scene (see figure 4, AVID Pro Tools session). Also, a feathery violin motif abruptly punctuates the scene. The score, which lasts for approximately 1 minute and 30 seconds, assists in building the sexual tension within the scene. The remainder of the scene lasts 5 minutes and 30 seconds and contains no music.

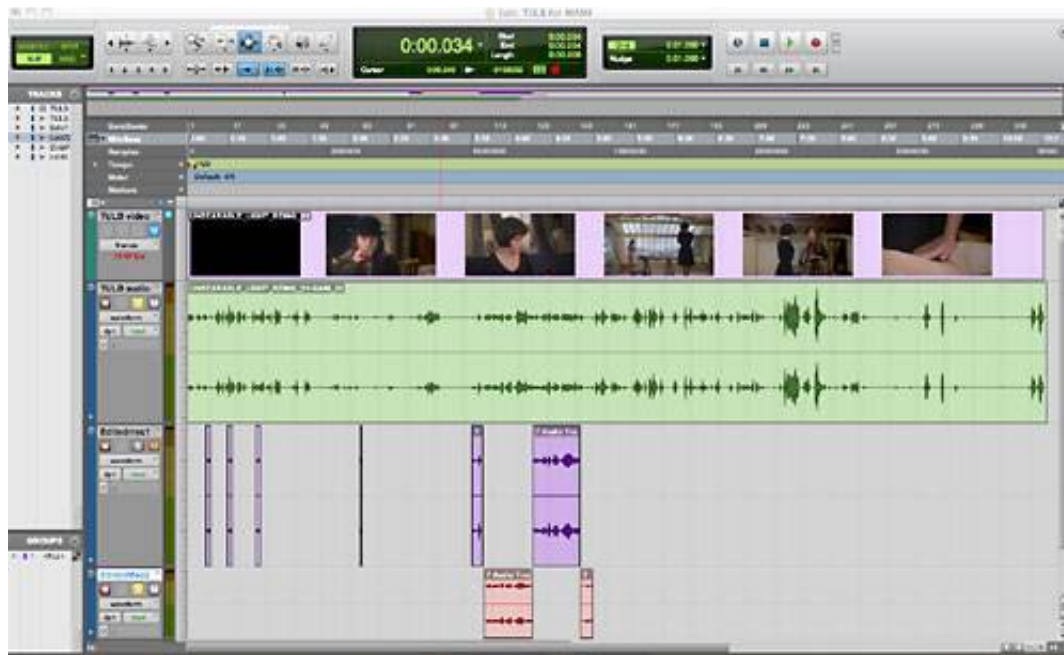


Figure 4. AVID Pro Tools session. Top stereo tracks: The full soundtrack from scene. Below I have edited together, in synch with the full soundtrack for the film, two sets of edited music tracks from Leos Janáček's "In the Mist, II: Molto Adagio" and "Sonata for Violin and Piano, IV: Adagio" on *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* original soundtrack CD recording.

Tereza pulls back one of the curtains and starts to photograph Sabina. The shutter speed is slow to begin with, but gets faster and slower in accompaniment to the edited music. She walks around Sabina in a semicircle and pulls back the second curtain. Tereza brushes aside Sabina's hair to expose more of her, and Sabina's vulnerability is evident. She covers her face, and her gasping breathing can be heard. Tereza kneels on the floor with Sabina and continues to take pictures of her, but Sabina continues to look away. She then watches Tereza, submits to her orders, and smiles at her. There is a moment when Tereza looks down at Sabina and it becomes clear that a shift in tension has changed the dynamic of the scene. The soft, feathery violin motif shifts down an octave on the realization that the women share a sexual chemistry.

The music stops abruptly, and a roll of thunder and the sound of rain can be heard from outside the apartment. The scene cuts to Sabina drawing the curtains while Tereza continues to take photos. Tereza begins to cry while photographing Sabina as the rain runs down the windowpane and the thunder rumbles on. Sabina looks on concerned. The scene cuts to Sabina's bedroom, where Tereza reloads her camera and Sabina pulls on a kimono. Tereza looks around the space; Sabina picks up the camera and orders Tereza to take off her clothes. Tereza refuses at first but then hiding behind a sofa, awkwardly undresses, leaving on only her French knickers. Sabina takes a quick photo. Tereza gasps and runs around the room. What follows is a chase as Tereza covers her breasts. Both women run around the apartment laughing. The shutter speed is fast during the chase. There is a distinct slap to the shutter sound (see figure 5 for the stereo image of some of these unedited sound effects from the *Sound Mountain* archive). Tereza dives onto the sofa and throws cushions at Sabina.

Sabina slowly approaches her and straddles her legs, stroking Tereza's back and pulling down her underwear. Sabina orders Tereza to look at her. Tereza's breathing is very heavy by this point. The sexual intimacy and excitement is highly palpable. Sabina continues photographing Tereza and moves Tereza's arm behind her back. She holds Tereza's arm in position until she finally releases the tension. Tereza responds by lightly clasping her hand.

The scene then cuts to Tereza naked in front of the fireplace. Sabina is peering at Tereza's face and lies down to get a low-angle shot of Tereza. The sound of the fire crackling is very prominent here. Sabina screws up her face while concentrating on her framing, Tereza smiles. Both women begin to laugh, rolling around on the floor. The scene ends with Franz (Derek de Lint), Sabina's lover, entering the apartment.

The music throughout these scenes is sparse, amounting only to the piano motif repeated four times and a 1½-minute edited piece that uses two different pieces by Janáček, skillfully edited by Splet. Music is not washed over the scene but is used carefully to build tension between the characters. For most of the time in these two scenes, Splet relies on the use of sound effects and the dramatic action between the two women to carry the drama. There is a sense that sound and music are not competing here but actually coalescing to create a symbiotic musicality.

While researching the sound effects for *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in the *Sound Mountain* archive, I became aware of the number of recordings of different cameras in the library. The fact that Tereza is a photographer would justify some recordings of cameras, but the extent and scale of these recordings led me to consider that Splet was looking for something more from these sounds. In this scene the sound of the camera creates a nervous, erotic tension between the women, and the role of the camera becomes paramount to the scene. Kaufman (quoted in Smith 1993) describes the scene:

It's about how seduction and creativity and sexuality are closely linked. The two women, Tereza lonely, Sabina interested in sexual excitements, Tomas is unfaithful to both of them really, and they find themselves in a moment that is arousing—and very disturbing. (42)

Kaufman wanted to explore this complex power dynamic between the women. Catherine Fellows (1992, 86) draws attention to Kundera's description of Tereza's use of the camera during this episode in the novel. Kundera (1984) wrote, "The camera served Tereza both as a mechanical eye through which to observe Tomas' mistress and a veil by which to conceal her face from her" (65). The camera is therefore used as an instrument of observation. Murch (2006a) describes a different sonic element created in the film version:

[T]he key for it for me was the camera itself, which is both an instrument of investigation and a torture instrument. Tereza is using it like a microscope to look at this woman but also the sound of the camera, the clack of the shutter, is like a slap to the face, and Sabina stands up to that.

Murch's "slap to face" is conjured up here by the taking of photographs, a violent act reinforced by the sound of the camera itself. This is a new element introduced to the film through the sound design. Although a connection is made between violence and the sound of the camera in the novel, it is not alluded to at this point in the novel nor for this specific context. It was something that was created by Splet for the film. Kundera does make a similar connection in the novel, but it is later in the novel, when Franz goes to protest at the Cambodian border about human rights violations. A request is made for the doctors to go and treat the injured. Kundera (1984) writes,

The response from the other side was a stunning silence. A silence so absolute that everyone's spirits sank. Only the cameras clicked on, sounding in the silence like the song of an exotic insect. . . . The silence on the other side of the river had hit them all like a slap in the face. (266–67)

This scene is not in the film adaptation. I believe that Splet married these ideas of the sound of the camera and the sound of the slap of silence and incorporated them into this other scene that also centers on the sound of the camera. It gives more weight to the scene and adds to the dramatic tension.

The sound effects library contains recordings from four different cameras: Canon AE1, Contax 139, Nikon F2, and Olympus OM-1, but not the Praktica model we see on screen. These cameras were recorded at various different shutter speeds and advance motion from 1/15th to 1/500th of a second release. Kroeber recorded these sound effects in mono and stereo. The stereo recordings were made with a Schoeps and FRAP contact microphone. The cameras were recorded with film inside and without film, and with the back open and closed from varying perspectives. The FRAP was placed on the side of the lens with the Schoeps further away coming from the side, with the FRAP underneath the body of the camera with the Schoeps facing the back of the body, and with the FRAP on the back with the Schoeps pointing through the lens. Kroeber and Splet's attempt to achieve this slapping effect brought about a lengthy experimentation in the recording of the stills camera. The sonic possibilities created, through the slapping sound, brought a tension to bear on the characters and narrative of the film.



Figure 5. AVID Pro Tools session. Camera effects from *Sound Mountain* archive. FRAP track on top and Schoeps below, at different shutter speeds.



Play .wav file (48.35 MB)



Play .mp3 file (5.76 MB)

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* camera sound effects.

Murch (2006a) explains how the editing also furthered the violence of this act through the use of jump cuts:

In this scene, there is this kind of a mixture of lyricism and suddenness in the editing which goes with that ambiguity of the camera being both a weapon and a shield. That the beauty of the women and what they are doing certainly has to be expressed to be beautiful on the face of it, yet there also has to be this undercurrent of unpredictability and suddenness which you'll see in some of the ways the cuts are done. There will be a series of three or four lyrical cuts and then suddenly she pulls the curtain apart as if to say, "Now we're going to get into it, no more veils." That cut is actually a big jump cut in terms of the action; there is nothing that really matches there. But the violence of the cut the suddenness of the movement, the sound that goes with it, and what the music is doing all create that moment that something else is happening so that at that point the scene suddenly goes up onto a different level.

The acting, picture composition, editing, music, and sound all work together to create the eroticism and tension within the scene. The fact that the sound is similar to a slap brings this idea further than the other elements alone could have. Splet achieves here with the simple sound of a camera shutter release a new way to interpret the scene between Tereza and Sabina.

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a good example of Splet's working practices and a robust illustration of his mastery of detailed sound design. It can be considered a modern classic of art-house cinema in which Splet created an extraordinary music and sound track that enriched the film. His success in these dual roles led him to be offered this

opportunity again on Kaufman's *Henry and June* (1990) and *Rising Sun* (1993). He created incidental moments such as the sound of the camera's shutter and transformed the dynamics of the scene through these significant experiments. The film manages to capture the essence of Kundera's philosophical novel within a chronological narrative structure. Shot in Lyon, France, the film visually and aurally conjures up the Prague of the late 1960s. Splet creates a vibrant soundtrack through careful editing of Janáček's compositions and weaves his sound design through this music to enhance the sense of place, narrative, and character. Sound and music are not competing here; both aural elements are allowed the necessary space to contribute to the overall film. This integrated approach developed during preproduction allowed for early discussions between the key collaborators on the film and could be considered a template for future collaborative film projects.

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