

Celebrity Tourorists & the 'Terrible' Spectacle of Re-territorializing Trauma in Chechnya's Post-Urbacide City (*Or, No! You Are Never Going To Survive Unless You Get More Than A Little Crazy*).

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September 26, 2011

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Dear Shakira,

According to an AFP wire and officials from the Chechen Government, on October 5 you will attend the birthday of the President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, in Grozny. I'm writing to inform you of the critical human rights situation in Chechnya, explain the role that the president has played in this situation, and request that you cancel your attendance.

According to the human rights foundation Memorial, since Vladimir Putin appointed Ramzan Kadyrov as the President of the Chechen Republic in 2007, Kadyrov is accused of using torture, causing disappearances, and authorizing extrajudicial executions. Additionally, Kadyrov has imposed a strict Islamic moral code, enforced by the police, which restricts freedom of expression. These measures promote discrimination against women and sexual minorities.

Chechen officials estimate that, since 1994, more than 160,000 people have died in the conflict between Russia, the legitimate government of Chechnya (in exile), the government appointed by Russia, and terrorist groups. Since 2000, there have been thousands of undocumented deaths whose bodies are believed to be buried in one of the country's 52 mass graves. The Chechen Interior Ministry reported in 2000 that there were 15,000 people under arrest because of the conflict, and Memorial holds that between December 2006 and February 2007 there was 26 arbitrary detentions.

On July 3, 2010, Kadyrov stated publicly that the human rights defenders of his country were the "people's enemies." Kadyrov's attitude became more hostile after the murder of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya on October 7, 2006. Politkovskaya was killed while investigating allegations of torture committed by the Kadyrov government.

In July 2009, Natalia Estemirova, director of Memorial and Politkovskaya's best friend, was kidnapped and killed. Estemirova, who investigated human rights violations carried out by Kadyrov, had a private meeting with the Chechen president during which, according to Memorial director Oleg Orlov, Kadyrov himself threatened and insulted Estemirova. The case remains unsolved.

Dear Shakira, obviously this is just a brief overview of Chechnya's situation and the human rights violations in which Mr. Kadyrov has been involved. If you wish, I could describe in detail the crimes of Kadyrov and his government with more information, photos, videos, and books.

Considering this information, with a great respect and appreciation for your work as an artist, I believe that your participation in the birthday celebration of a political leader involved in such serious allegations of human rights violations would be improper for a public figure of your standing, conscientiousness, and commitment to human rights related issues.

I am sending this letter asking you to urgently consider canceling your attendance of the birthday of the President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, scheduled for October 5 in Grozny.

If you have any concerns or questions, you can contact me at +1.212.246.8486 or by email.

Sincerely,

Thor Halvorssen
President
Human Rights Foundation

** This letter is a translation of the original letter sent to Shakira in Spanish on Sept 26, 2011*

Version 1.0

TERRIBLE OPENING GALA

Time score, working note commentary and timings within the essay refer to the Day Of The City event broadcast from 5th October 2011. Original post uploaded on 7th October 2011 by TheTumso Channel as: Открытие делового центра "Грозный Сити (The Opening Of The Business Center "Grozny City").

Sequences directly referenced in the paper are highlighted in red.

0.00:00-0.00:06	www.ChechnyaToday.com ident
0.00:06-0.00:17	Title.
0.00:17-0.00:51	Opening Title & Theme: Sander Van Doorn- Intro (XXBooty mix).
0.00:51-0.22:34	Presidential cavalcade / Commentary & various Chechen musical arrangements
0.22:34-0.23:45	SILENT SCENE: Arrival Of President Kadyrov
0.23:45-0.24:00	President with entourage on foot/ Commentary.
0.24:00-0.25:39	<i>Montage 1: The reconstruction of Grozny / Commentary & Contemporary Rock Image Economy: Remains of war and scarred buildings are removed and rebuilt.</i>
0.25:39-0.25:57	Programme Ident – Flag of Russia (with COA) & Chechen Federal Republic.
0.25:57-0.28:04	<i>Montage 2: Features of New Grozny / Commentary & Electronica</i> <i>Note: use of reversed film and appearance of Kadyrov with entourage in training suits.</i>
0.28:04-0.28:15	Extd. 'Scream' ident / Title / Picture Economy: Young Children & Apartment Building. Discordant sound ident.
0.28:15-0.28:28	Silent wide-shot on Grozny cityscape with predominance of the grand mosque.
0.28:28-0.28:46	Commentary resumes.
0.28:46-0.31:53	Scene of arrivals irregularly intercut with wide shot of Grozny / Commentary.
0.31:53-0.31:58	Irregular cut to Announcer at microphone.
0.31:58-0.34:23	Scene inside auditorium.
0.34:23-0.35:07	Silent Live Transmission: Roving camera shot on Grozny.
0.35:07-0.36:33	View onto plaza: shadows on wall with music.
0.36:33-0.36:43	Stage preparations.
0.36:43-0.40:37	Roving shots of plaza Grozny & performance stage (music repeats) Shot from the mosque.
0.40:37-0.40:38	Cross Fade to screentest.
0.40:38-0.40:52	Wide shot of performance stadium from the mosque.
0.40:53-0.41:27	Commentary resumed briefly – view from the mosque.
0.41:27-0.41:46	Title.
0.41:46-0.41:53	Grozny Terek Ident
0.41:53-0.51:22	<i>Montage 3: Documentary History of Grozny. Picture Economy - Modernisation & from 0.45:08 conflict with emphasis of consequences on the buildings. / 'epic' soundtrack</i>
0.51:23-0.51:57	Adhan with mosque now lit and shot with reflection then montage of detail and perspective.
0.51:57-0.53:01	<i>Montage 4: Infrastructure montage / Commentary /Synth-strings – Sports Complex to Industrial to public spaces.</i>
0.53:01-0.53:56	<i>Montage 5: Infrastructure montage: CGI Visions and civic space. Commentary / Ambient</i>
0.53:56-0.54:18	<i>Montage 6: / ... / Vanaikh String</i>
0.54:18-0.55:34	<i>Montage 7: Grozny rebuilt & the city at night. Synth Strings.</i>
0.55:34-0.55:44	Title with discordant sound.
0.55:44-1.00:34	Return to live broadcast & commentary. A man is singing. Mosque cam view onto public screening performance area. Various views of Grozny by night.
1.00:35-1.00:38	Transmission Silence. View of mosque.
1.00:38-1.01:27	<i>Montage 8: Nostalgia – images of Chechens from 1960's & 70's.</i>
1.01:27-1.02:57	<i>Montage 9: Urbacide / Commentary / Contemporary Rock and material consequence of war. Reconstruction.</i>

1.02:57-1.03:16	Programme Ident
1.03:16-1.07:29	<i>Montage 10: Grozny Highways & Reconstruction / Commentary / Medley – prevalent empty public spaces.</i>
1.07:29-1.07:34	Titles with discordant sound
1.07:34-1.08:20	Cut to wider shot of Grozny by night. Transmission silence is broken by sounds of Chechen pop and commentary resumes.
1.08:20-1.08:37	Cut to performance arena
1.08:37-1.09:29	President Kadyrov enters the performance auditorium and sits with Alexander Khloponin, then Vice-Premier of the Russian Federation and Plenipotentiary Envoy of President Putin to the North Caucasus region. There is a low round table almost inextricably placed in front of their seats on the front row. Khloponin sits first.
1.09:29-1.10:40	As Kadyrov leans to talk to Khloponin, cut to wider shots of Grozny by night / Chechen pop now plays at a lower level. Commentary continues.
1.10:40-1.11:01	Wide shot – largely of the front row and carpeted area. Another table is revealed.
1.11:01-1.13:02	Close in on Kadyrov greeting and introducing. A photograph is taken. A programme manager seeks the President's approval to begin. Kadyrov has demonstrated discomfort with the crotch fit of his trousers.
1.13:02-1.14:01	Again Kadyrov leans to talk to Khloponin, cut to wider shots of stage viewed from some rows behind Kadyrov. Chechen pop plays at previous level. Commentary continues. House Lights flash signal and there is a surge of audience taking seats.
1.14:01-1.14:03	Lights Flash
1.14:03-1.16:00	Kadyrov receives a brief and conveys this to Khloponin. Kadyrov rubs his face ending with his nose. As he speaks to Khloponin, Kadyrov points to the stage and then keeps his hands around the mouth.
1.16:00-1.16:01	Lights Flash
1.16:01-1.16:23	Continued shot of Khloponin and Kadyrov with background music.
1.16:23-1.16:45	Guitar Solo – with Queen-style rock
1.16:45-1.19:48	Music fades to leave broadcast dead time. Two suited advisors seek clarification. Kadyrov rubs chin, mouth, nose and alters collar. He embraces a woman and continues discussion with Khloponin. Sound of auditorium. The table is wiped.
1.19:48-1.20:56	Wide shot of Grozny looking onto mosque. Sound of auditorium.
1.20:57-1.21:59	Synthesiser Fanfare.
1.21:59-1.24:03	Welcome & introduction in Russian, Chechen (and welcome in English).
1.24:03-1.25:56	Testimony (on the fantastical and real).
1.25:56-1.26:28	Introduction to Khloponin with fanfare.
1.26:28-1.30:50	Khloponin addresses audience.
1.30:50-1.31:08	Introduction to Kadyrov with fanfare. Kadyrov drops his speech paper.
1.31:08-1.34:06	Kadyrov addresses audience. Audience remains standing for sometime.
1.34:06-1.36:46	Lightshow and pan through Grozny on screen. Music used: Yanni – Standing In Motion / The Storm.
1.36:46-1.39:01	Announcer #1 introduces Host (Igor Vernik). Vernik tells opening joke, reiterates the context of the event and previews forthcoming appearances of JCVD & Hilary Swank.
1.39:01-1.42:11	More operatic rock - Danuvius: Audiomachine. During the screened montage the audience is filmed. Kadyrov exchanges jovial comments with Khloponin. Awkward television.
1.42:11-1.43:11	Dissolve to wide still of Grozny by night.
1.43:11-1.44:20	More audience watching screened montage. Audience member yawning and a phone call can be seen as an excerpt of movie dialogue ensues. A man gestures a question and appears unconvinced.
1.44:20-1.44:52	Two figures are seen surveying the scene with gestured commentary to their conversation..
1.44:52-1.45:29	Grozny city towers lit largely by searchlights and external colour lighting from below.

1.45:29-1.46:01	As the screening completes, Kadyrov can be seen checking his cellphone.
1.46:01-1.50:06	Jean Claude Van Damme
1.50:06-1.50:28	JCVD shakes hands and sits next to Ramzan Kadyrov as the host extends a welcome. JCVD and Kadyrov clasp hands once sat.
1.50:28-1.50:53	Vernik segue and introduction to Hilary Swank.
1.50:53-1.52:11	Swank screened montage
1.52:11-1.56:00	Hilary Swank
1.56:00-2.00:02	Adhan – various shots of Grozny.
2.00:02-2.01:18	Vernik segue and introduction to Sergey Bezrukov.
2.01:18-2.03:38	Sergey Bezrukov
2.03:38-2.04:06	Vernik leaves the stage as it is prepared.
2.04:06-2.04:29	Announcers introduce Vanessa Mae
2.04:29-2.06:40	Applause and momentary pause and musicians prepare
2.06:40-2.07:05	Synth chord precedes Vanessa Mae's entrance.
2.07:05-2.31:19	Vanessa Mae:
2.31:19-2.31:54	Applause.
2.31:54-2.32:43	Announcer with brief pause in performance.
2.32:43-2.33:26	Visual Segue. Industrial music introduction.
2.33:26-2.41:13	Crane-suspended Aerial display team. Neo-Avant-gardism – pseudo activity?
2.41:13-2.42:10	Crane hoists performers away.
2.42:10-2.44:00	Craning view of Grozny. Sound from auditorium.
2.44:00-2.45:00	Announcers segue – introduction to Vanaikh dance screening
2.45:00- 2.45:20	Khloponin and Kadyrov in jovial animated exchange.
2.45:20-2.45:44	Laibach-style commentary introduces filmed folk dance on screen.
2.45:44-2.56:46	Lights go up for Ballet. Kadyrov claps on the appearance of the female dancers. Dance of the water-carriers followed by all male dance with sabres. Males and females partner leaving one couple to perform a Lezginika. A rival, accompanied by a unit of men interrupts the dance and the two groups of soldiers fight in a display of combat choreography. Frenetic drumming and accordion accompany a battery of sequences. As the two rivals meet in a dual the woman throws her scarf down and in picking it up the rival is seen off.
2.56:59-3.00:35	Chechen Pop - screened film of Kadyrov and Grozny projects whilst 'rivals' dance.
3.00:35-3.04:34	Chechen Pop-singer Tamila Sagaipova singing Даймохк <i>Daymoxk</i> (Fatherland). Flowers presented whilst the singer is still ending the song.
3.04:34-3.05:20	Announcer segue
3.05:20-3.07:14	Chechen singer – traditional arrangement
3.07:14-3.08:23	Flowers are presented by Kadyrov mid-verse and he briefly dances on stage. The audience stand and he finishes with a bow to his partnering dancers, the singer and the audience. As he returns to his seat Khloponin embraces him.
3.08:23-3.11:23	Song completes.
3.11:23-3.15:16	<i>Trauma Montage – music repeat – cuts into building oriented 'war porn'. Ramzan's father – Akhmed Kadyrov also eulogized.</i>
3.15:16-3.20:24	<i>Ramzan Rebuilds Montage</i> – reconstruction work then prepares the ground for a sequence on traditional dance within the economy.
3.20:24-3.21:23	<i>'Allah's Gifts' Montage.</i> Kadyrov and entourage parade 'holy relics'. English lyrics to song:
3.21:23-3.22:42	<i>Zakir Montage</i> (possibly extracted from Chechen Lullaby?). Footage of Kadyrov leading worship. Traditional Chechnya fused with contemporary context. Grozny and Chechnya's place within the Russian Federation represented by a computer generated animated map.
3.22:42-3.23:21	Segue – Ramzan Kadyrov checks his cellphone again.
3.23:21-3.28:05	Jan Rouven – German born Las Vegas illusion act. 'Melting Through Metal'.
3.28:05-3.31:40	Rouven's second act.
3.31:40-3.33:30	MDR television ballet dancers
3.33:30-3.41:30	Rouven's participatory third act.

3.41:30-3.42:15 MDR television dance to Jennifer Lopez' On The Floor.
 3.42:15-3.42:40 Hiatus
 3.42:40-3.42:52 Announcer again introduces Jean-Claude Van Damme
 3.45:52-3.43:07 First appearance of >>VIDEO LOCK ERROR - NO INPUT SIGNAL<<
 Transmission difficulties with chrominance.
 3.43:07-3.44:08 JCVD rearranges microphones and sits with Translator on steps to stage.
 3.44:08-3.44:25 >>VIDEO LOCK ERROR - NO INPUT SIGNAL<<
 3.44:25-3.46:44 JCVD resumed. As JCVD leaves the stage Kadyrov embraces him.
 3.46:44-3.55:04 Ukrainian pop-singer Ruslana performs Wild Dances & Kolomijka
 3.55:04-3.55:19 Announcer
 3.55:18-4.04:00 Sofia Rotaru sings Ya Nazovu Planetu Imenum Tvoim & Одна калина.
 4.04:00-4.04:43 Hiatus
 4.04:43-4.05:07 Programme Sequence
 4.05:07-4.05:40 Hiatus with Announcer introduction to Igor Vernik
 4.05:40-4.12:15 Igor Vernik with Sergey Bezrukov performed speech whilst band is set up.
 4.12:15-4.13:50 Medal is presented...
 4.13.50-4.14:19 Short hiatus. Seal is introduced.
 4.14:19-4.15:59 Hiatus
 4.15:59-4.16:38 Programme sequence
 4.16:38-4.17:25 Hiatus
 4.17:29-4.43:07 Seal sings If I'm Any Closer, Loaded, It's A Man's World, Kiss From A Rose & Crazy.
 4.43:07-4.53.00 Announcer heralds fireworks to Also Sprach Zarathustra. Begins with Strauss ends with Hans Zimmer.
 4.53:00-4.53:57 Dead time. Production team can be heard.
 4.53:57-4.54:46 End titles with theme: Sander Van Doorn- Intro (XXBooty mix).

Version 2.0

As the exemplar letter sent from the Human Rights Foundation (HRF) to artists makes explicit¹, the events dubbed Chechnya's 'Day Of The City' coincided with the 35th birthday of the Federal Republic's president, Ramzan Kadyrov on the 5th October, 2011². The HRF letter provides an exemplary precursor to this essay in outlining international concerns and citing incidences of human rights violations through state-sponsored terror with which Kadyrov, both preceding and during his tenure as Chechen president, has been associated.

There can be read an almost indelible association with the Grozny event in the circulation of HRF's exemplar letter addressed to Shakira, one of the artists who did not attend in response to Kadyrov's invitation to Chechnya. Whilst Shakira did not play for Kadyrov in Grozny, this lingering trace of association might be read as indexical testimony to her Georgian concert in 2007. On this occasion Shakira performed as guest to the exiled former president Mikheil Saakashvili, now facing multiple criminal charges for corruption and embezzlement in Chechnya's neighbouring Caucasian republic. According to Collin, when surrounded by former members of *Boney M* as special guests in the same 2007 concert as Shakira, Saakashvili made claim to provide Georgia with a "disco approach to conflict resolution"³. Where Saakashvili's state spectacle from 2007 is argued to provide a pop precursor to Kadyrov's own event, the Georgian president's invitation to Shakira might have taken its turn from Hugo Chavez. As Venezuelan president, Chavez opened up the La Carlota military air base, the site of a previous attempted coup against his government, to accommodate Shakira's 2006 concert there.

Whilst seemingly neither forgetting nor forgiving Shakira's transgressions, the HRF letter might also be read to critically understate the extent to which the 'strict Islamic code, enforced by the police'⁴ fully articulates how Kadyrov's self-styled Islam is reinforced by his sizable personal militia absorbed within his Interior Ministry of Defence. By way of bringing currency to Kadyrov's continued employ of contract killings, to the deaths of *Memorial* director, Natalia Estemirova and *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Anna Politkovskaya (as noted by the HRF letter), there might be added Kadyrov's association to the killing of Vladimir Putin's political opponent, Boris Nemtsov on the 27th February 2015⁵. Upon announcement of the death sentence for

¹ Human Rights Foundation. 2011.

² Ivanov, A. 2011.

³ Collin, M. 2015: 151.

⁴ HRF. 2011.

⁵ Walker 2015.

Dhokhar Tsarnaev's indictment in the 2012 Boston Marathon Bombings, Kadyrov made accusations of the US Intelligence Agencies framing the young Chechen. Kadyrov's claims, that the bombings were a counter-terror 'false flag' operation and the young US-Chechen merely a *patsy*, were reported alongside the internet circulated conspiracy theories from which Kadyrov's narrative appears to have been drawn⁶. Whilst downplaying coincidence of the declared national holiday through reportedly banning the commemoration of his 35th birthday, when asked where the source of funding came from for the 'Day Of The City' celebrations in Grozny in 2011, Kadyrov laughingly replied "Allah gives it to us. I don't know, it comes from somewhere"⁷.

Within what Schuler coins as the 'performance democracy' of Vladimir Putin's Russia⁸, Kadyrov provides no less a figure for exemplifying such theatricalized politics. Most simply, he might be envisioned as an Ubu of the Chechen fiefdom, a ruler who is both eclipsed by the 'one man show' of Putin, whilst also remaining deeply indebted to him. After the assassination of his father and then Chechen president Akhmed Kadryov in 2004, Ramzan Kadyrov represented the *siloviki*⁹ solution and succession of governance in the post-1999 counter-terror process of Chechenisation. In turn, it is argued that Grozny's 'Day Of The City' represented a zenith in the subsequent '*No More Traces Of War*' policies that were undertaken by Ramzan's regime. As Gilligan observes, within this process torture sites and mass graves were made to disappear in seeking to erase the legacies of civil war and as a means of solving national trauma¹⁰.

Disappearances and extra-judicial executions have also been recorded that extend from persons suspected of direct participation in combat to those accused of aiding, harbouring or sympathising with those associated with anti-Russian sentiments. These recriminations extend from the separatist nationalist fight for the Chechen People's Republic of Ichkeria, through to the factions of mujahideen and Islamicist fighters that later formed as the self-proclaimed Caucasus Emirate in 2007. The lawlessness that was a predominant feature of Chechnya's postmodern war has now become State-sanctioned violence, with incidences of arbitrary civilian abduction further redoubling political terror.

⁶ Pandey, 2015

⁷ Osborn, 2011.

⁸ Schuler, 2015.

⁹ Translated as 'people of force'. The 'silo' then refers to a top-down system of political power where, to echo the words of fictional mob boss Tony Soprano; "Shit runs downhill and money goes up. It's that simple."

¹⁰ Gilligan, 2010.

Underscoring the individual endorsements, platitudes offered to the president, or commitment to their performances given in Grozny, it is arguably an advocacy of political normalcy that is represented by the collective celebrity appearance on the 5th October 2011. The complicities and consents afforded by the artists' presence might be collectively sutured by a willingness to receive an undisclosed six-figure fee as a return for making their appearance. In initially framing a need of Chechnya's *sovereign democracy* to effect such a spectacular star-studded normalcy, the dramaturgical consistency of the event is argued as more nuanced than Hutnyk's mere 'pantomime terror'¹¹ in requiring conceptual terms that Baudrillard first wrote of as 'Our Theatre Of Cruelty'¹² and later as a 'theatre of decomposition'¹³ for bringing analysis to 'rogue events'¹⁴.

At once the spectacle of politics is highly theatricalised and energised to imbue the mundane as a tolerable mask for the absence of the real. The exceptional presence of Western celebrity is argued to instrumentally perform as affirmation for a restored everyday normalcy that is both anticipated and insisted by the event. The representations of Grozny's rebuilding and rebranding, not only as the rebirth of a public sphere but also of the people's identity, is equally argued as the event's transparent ideological impetus. The CGI skyscrapers and simulated scar-healed structures that rise from the once urbacid city of Grozny are represented with an equivalence to renewed cultural strength¹⁵. The overall dramaturgical structure of the evening combines wrecking ball wrought cathartic treatment and spectacle of metamorphic 'solution' to Chechnya's mass-trauma.

In proposing that the celebrity guests represent a particular form of what Phipps presciently termed the 'tourorist'¹⁶, there is a conceptual revisiting of these figures as a hybrid of terrorist and tourist. Jean Claude Van Damme's opening 'not-speech', establishes what is argued as the ideological impetus of a cathartic function insisted in the repeated equivalence between Grozny, as index to the health of State, and an expected emergence from post-traumatic conditions in the Chechen consciousness.

¹¹ Hutnyk, 2014.

¹² Baudrillard, 1982.

¹³ *ibid* 2010:

¹⁴ *ibid* 2010b: 89

¹⁵ See Coward, 2008.

¹⁶ Phipps. 1999.

JCVD: Thank you, all of you. Errr... I want to be on the side of my heart (*changes places at microphone stand with Translator*). Heh! So, first of all I am very happy to be invited here. And errr, I'm not very good as a speech-man. So I am going to talk with my heart and soul to the people... of Chechenia, and I very happy to be in this wonderful place in Grozny. Wooah! Haha! So er...I've seen I like it. I have seen the plan of this place and what I have seen already constructed is even better than what I have seen in my..nnnnn... on the map. And the way this place...I should applaud you actually because you are doing this. So, anyway I was very impressed by this cultural center and I will be the first one to err, make a great errr, publicity, to make a great talk about it in Hollywood to all my fellow actors to come here. So I wish to this country, Chechenia, lots of peace, lots of love and if you stay strong like you are, people of you. And I want to felicitate Mr Kadyrov for his invitation to me, Razman Kadyrov. And my voice isn't so good because I've just finished a movie, an action movie where I scream a lot. So I will give you a sample of an action move and hopefully I will not crrrrccckk my pants. (*To Translator – 'So you stay like this'*) Ready? Wooahhh! (*JCVD performs an axe kick*) Thank you so much. I love you Chechenia. I love you Mr K...K..Kadyrov. I love you all in my heart for life. Thank you.¹⁷

Albeit less touristic than his later appearance, JCVD's manic urgency is matched by nervousness and self-apology as a 'not-speechman'. His stammering, short phrased sentences, 'from-his-heart-and-soul', lead to platitudes for the return of soul, love and strength from a 'Chechenian' people. These are then surpassed by his offer to 'felicitate' the president 'Razman' (sic). JCVD's employ of the term 'Chechenian', more generally associated with academic or media recognition for the 1990s Chechen-Ichkeria separatist movement¹⁸, is misplaced within the bigger picture of his appearance in Grozny and evidently dissonant with the translator's repeated correction to 'Chechen'. Whilst further advocacy for a 'Chechenyan' (sic) people is also repeated in a tweet written by Seal after the event, JCVD's promised evangelizing to his 'friends in Hollywood' seems to anticipate the contribution he might personally make to Grozny's future that he further heralded as 'better-than-on-the-map'.

Hilary Swank presented the subject of her travel to Grozny as substance of her speech with an endorsement for the Turkish construction company, *Bora İnşaat* and a 'Happy Birthday Mr President', then offered as sum return for her appearance.

Hilary Swank: As-Salaam-Alaikum,.. Erm. It is so wonderful to be here tonight. Thank you so much for inviting me to your beautiful city. I got opportunity to take a tour of the city today and I'm always taken by the, erm, the passion to make peace and to make something beautiful and, erm, I could feel the spirit of

¹⁷ From 1.46:01-1.50:06.

¹⁸ For example see Wood, T. 2007.

the people that everyone felt so happy. It was nice to be around. Erm, I was told that a company called, erm, err, Bora in Turkey had done a lot of the work, the construction here and erm, I pay a lot of attention to details and they did a fantastic job so congratulations to them. Erm, I, I've, this is my first time in Grozny, erm, I love to travel, I love to see the world, I love to see different cultures so really, truly from me this is a great honour to learn more about you and your country and what you are building. And I hope someday when you get your opera house built, maybe I'll have a film premiere here. (*Whispers to translator clarifying 'a film premiere'*). I'm sure it is going to be beautiful. And, erm, Happy Birthday Mr President. Thank you again very much... (*To translators - 'How did I know?'*) Oh, I read, I do my research. (*giggles*) And I saw all, all the people dressed up so beautifully today, I said "Wow! They really do it up here, they're even more formal and beautiful than the people in New York City". Yup! I thought, 'Wow! Are they going to a premiere?' So again, thank you so much for having me.¹⁹

Within tourist rubric for the city, the architecture, the style and *élan* of its supposed citizens as all 'beautiful', Hilary Swank's address reiterated the evening's ideological imperative in equating the city's rebuilding with the spirit of a new Chechen people. Swank managed to partially name the construction company responsible for brokering her appearance but, unlike JCVD, avoided stumbling over and incorrectly pronouncing the president's name by avoiding any direct address, or reference to Ramzan Kadyrov, by name. Swank can be seen to transpose her glamour-oriented travel experiences into a self-authenticated 'style guided' hermeneutic adding emphasis on her own 'first time' visit to Grozny and the claim to observing the 'people' dressed in a way that Westerners might only adopt for a film premiere occasion.

Swank's seeming advocacy of Kadyrov's policies regarding civilian appearance as 'more formal and beautiful than the people in New York City' is delivered with a conviction to this observation as a self-surprising challenge to her own cultural preconceptions. What Swank saw is substantiated by accounts of restricted access to the city that day with reporting of exclusive admittance to cars bearing Kadrovsky number plates²⁰. Where Swank speaks of the 'you people' who 'really do it up', it is then both regarding and addressed to Kadyrov's ruling elite.

In speculatively proposing a further return to Grozny, upon the completion of an opera house and to attend one of her own film premieres, Swank betrayed the extent to which the work on the city remained incomplete for the launch. Whilst providing some contrast to JCVD's claim

¹⁹ From 1.52:11-1.56:00

²⁰ Ivanov, A. 2011.

that the realisation was better-than-on-the-map', Swank inadvertently indexes the contractual disputes between Kadryov's government and *Bora İnşaat* that resulted in substantial non-payment of the Turkish construction employees. With failed negotiations reportedly based on insufficient security concerns for *Bora İnşaat* executive travelling to Chechnya, the employees faced either deportation or remained stranded in Grozny.

Where the political context of their appearance in Chechnya shudders beneath the surface, it is the 'up-too-close' ethical sensitivities and advocacies ensconced within the anodyne that might best summarize the 'celebrity tourorists' provisional 'not-speeches'. Then, seemingly acting through 'listening to his unique inner voice' imbued during Jan Rouven's illusionist act, JCVD takes to the stage for a third time with an informally presented confession of the celebrity tourorist's categorical imperative:

JCVD: We actors travel to all kinds of places and I have to be honest about this. We are invited to make some money and they are telling us to talk nice about a place we don't know. Please quiet! Quiet! Ssssh! And I've seen...
>>VIDEO LOCK ERROR - NO INPUT SIGNAL<< ..²¹

In response to JCVD's spontaneity, informality and the subsequent tension with an inattentive audience during this third impromptu taking of the stage, the translator's nervousness is accentuated through tonal urgency and stammers. JCVD's short phrasing leave sentences suspended and the direction that he might be taking evidently of some concern in evoking political sensitivities within wild unpredictability. There is momentary exposure of the translator's invidious position and a sense of threatening precariousness that his 'good intentions' to translate JCVD might easily go 'awry'.

Preceded by chrominance issues, the seventeen seconds of transmission loss momentarily severs JCVD's elucidation of the exchanges between celebrity appearances, blind endorsement and 'fiddling' for a fee. Perhaps here, if not well before, the experience of this screened event is propelled into what Ngai has coined the 'stuplime'²² and there is an

²¹ From 3.43:07-3.44:08.

²² Ngai. 2000: 15. Ngai defines the 'stuplime' as occurring when 'astonishment is paradoxically united with boredom... Unlike the sublime, the stuplime paradoxically forces the reader to go on in spite of its equal enticement to surrender, inducing a series of comic fatigues or tirednesses rather than a single, earthshattering blow to one's conceptual apparatus, thus pushing the reader to constantly formulate and reformulate new tactics for reading. Confrontations with the stuplime bear more resemblance to the *repetitive* exhaustions performed by Kierkegaard's Beckmann, Buster Keaton, or Pee-Wee Herman than the instantaneous breakdown dramatized in encounters with elemental forces.

encounter with what Derrida reserves as the limits of our ‘*and/is (et/est)* analogies’ at the faltering point of event comprehensibility. In the seventeen seconds of missing broadcast resides uncertainty in whether ‘the plug is pulled’ through nerve, will or technological error. Before the loss of transmission there is a tension as JCVD urgently orders the audience to ‘be quiet’ and the gesturing of a ‘knifed’ hand slicing across own his throat seems to act almost as a cue in coinciding with the cut to coverage. It is a moment within the mediated event that readily finds cinematic equivalence in Neo’s unplugging from *The Matrix* as the subsequent glitch in transmission provides a momentary performance for a ‘desert of the real’ to expose the hyperreal qualities of the event.

As the transmission returns, the confession has moved on and JCVD seems to suggest that presidential responsibility for unity amongst the Chechen ‘tribes’ imbues a rejuvenating effect.

JCVD... Because I left school early and I have no much education. No, those tribes I believe are together again. And those people are in their blood warriors. And they believe in Nature, in Love and Brotherhood. And this man – Ramzan – was able to put those people together. I’ve seen him it seems, he is happy to see all this happening now, in less than ten years. I saw him much older on the camera, there, on the screen. Now I see him younger because the problems go away. So I am so happy to learn about you. I feel like I have a small piece in my heart of your big country... As-Salaam-Alaikum.²³

Within the legacy of Anna Politkovskaya’s writing is a persisted urgency for a continued testimony to Kadyrov’s criminality and corruption²⁴. Through her unbridled expose and extensive reporting on the ‘small corner of hell’ in Chechnya, Politkovskaya’s killing-to-contract in 2006 was inextricably bound to Ramzan Kadyrov’s ascension to presidency. As both ‘solution’ to Russia’s perennial problem in the Caucasus region and as return for his fealty to Putin’s United Russia party, Kadyrov continues to represent the Alaroy *teip* turn of allegiance from the wars. The appearance of singer Makka Sagaipova at Ramzan’s celebrations is of some note, where Malid Saidullayev, her major sponsor and husband, was influential in brokering defection to the counter-revolutionary cause in the fin-de-siècle Chechen conflict.

Whilst Hilary Swank, JCVD, Vanessa Mae and Seal feature most prominently in online reportage, Las Vegas based illusionist, Jan Rouven, almost ‘melts through the mettle’ of the

²³ From 3.44:25-3.46:44

²⁴ See, for example, Politkovskaya, 2011: 164-170

media exposure from the event. His role in 'recruiting' dancers to appear alongside him in Grozny was subsequently revealed in a statement of regret and apology from the MDR (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk) TV Ballet²⁵. As with Vanessa Mae and JCVD, Jan Rouven's smokescreen of silence was afforded by personal management and PR agency.

Swank's attempt to provide a convincing act of contrition and apology on *The Jay Leno Show* in December 2011, did not sit comfortably beside the words she spoke two months earlier in Grozny. Where Swank boldly spoke of 'doing her research' in knowing that it was Kadyrov's birthday, during her US televised apology she then repeated the very need 'to do better research'²⁶ in avoiding any further regretful actions. Swank's pledge to further donate her appearance fee amongst charities also received earnest inquiry from Akhmed Zakaev in February 2012. The exiled Prime Minister of the unrecognised Chechen People's Republic of Ichkeria requested details from Swank on the charities benefitting from these funds in a letter that was circulated through internet and media channels²⁷. Alongside the inconsistencies of details challenging her integrity, Swank's fulfilment of such transparency was not forthcoming in any public response to Zakaev.

Vanessa Mae's participation in the event was idiosyncratic in terms of her not speaking at all during her performance or after the Grozny event. Where Žižek writes that 'doing nothing is the most violent thing to do'²⁸, in the absence of any statement, Mae's managed silence is left to speak. Along with JCVD and Rouven, her silence after the event perhaps acts best to reveal, *via negativa*, the consequences emerging from the collapse of Swank's personal management. Sacking her manager and distanced by her PR Agency during coverage and controversy after the event, representations of Swank target her wishing Kadyrov 'Happy Birthday' as a 'smoking gun' of ethico-political indictment.

With aesthetics considered through axioms of advocacy, Vanessa Mae's performance might be read as a platform for the cultural export of pop postmodernism. Her rock-riff underscored, techno-technical virtuosity as a classically trained violinist, romps through a 30-minute set. In the amplified, accelerated and hyper-modern assemblage, from Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance* to the reworking of *Four Seasons* in her 3-minute Vivaldi

²⁵ Twickel, N. 2011.

²⁶ Cited in Adams, 2011.

²⁷ Zakaev, 2012.

²⁸ Žižek, 2009: 183.

Storm, Mae's lunges and curved stances all direct the eye to the point of fusion between performer-instrument and synthesis of human-machine. In breaks interrupting this instrumental immersion, Mae walks stridently to re-position and stretches into her postured performance.

Less tight-lipped than the 'absolute violence' of Vanessa Mae's silence, Seal amply demonstrated the coupled role of surplus and sincerity in pop performance during his Grozny gig. Wearing black blazer, tight black jeans and a black t-shirt emblazoned with a neon pink print of The Sex Pistols' *God Save The Queen*, Seal's pumped performance in Grozny seemingly lacked observation for the State bound formalities of the occasion, with the anti-authoritarian sentiment in his choice of attire, further politically mismatched.

Seal:

Sings edited versions of If I'm Any Closer and Loaded. (To Audience) Thank you! Thank you! It's so wonderful an honour to be here in your beautiful country. It's my first time and hopefully not my last, now I wrote something down because it is my first time of speaking your language. So someone will give me that piece of paper. Hold on a second... Dahe-telleyo nochicho (Speaks Chechen for *this is my first time of speaking Chechen*) That is all I got. My name is Seal, by the way. Originally, originally we were told that we were going to sing for 25 minutes and then they said 30 minutes and now they say three songs. (To Hilary Swank) Hold on! I know you! You're not from Chechnya! (To audience) And errr... I know that we've been told three songs, so I'm going to sing a song for you by the late, great, James Brown. This is called This Is A Man's World and I feel it so much I think I'm going to sing it in the rain. OK, man's world guys.... *Sings This is A Man's World* (To The Band) You got rain back there? You got rain coming on? Is that rain?... We can? We don't have rain? We don't have rain? Absolutely not? OK we got Crazy. Ah actually let's have Kiss From A Rose. (To audience) OK, well you know it's raining as you can see. Personally I like the rain, my wife likes the rain, very much so... She says it's romantic, I say it's just wet. This is a song I wrote about 27 years ago..err... I still don't know what it's about so I don't really expect you to either, but either way we'll have a good time. ARE WE HAVING A GOOD TIME? We are? This is a...So this is a national holiday right? It's a national holiday here in Chechnya? Is it a national holiday? Well then it's cause for celebration right? Right? OK. So I am going to celebrate with you. This is called Kiss From A Rose. I don't like a microphone stand singing this song. *Sings Kiss From A Rose.* Spasibo. Thank you. Crazy. *Sings Crazy.* Spasibo. Thank you so much! Happy national day. Have a good time. They are dragging us off now so we got to go, but see you again. (To Hilary Swank) You look great Hilary. Where have you been hiding? (To Audience) Good night, thank you!²⁹

²⁹ Text from segues between songs. Seal performs from 4.17:29-4.43.07.

In the Auslander-Goffman frame for analysis of musicians oriented by consideration of their 'social' performance,³⁰ Seal's energised investment and commitment to the conventions of his authentic delivery far exceeded the expectations of the concert's setting and audience. Seal's ambition to 'headline' the evening in a final octane-fuelled act was received with a sense of the audience been overwhelmed by the performance. The crowd's reluctance to participate in performer-audience call/response and double-time clap with the music was further dampened by a shower of rain. Seal's failures of 'impression management'³¹; his emphatic performance of surplus; his seeming rebellious want to play a pre-arranged set against the wishes of the organisers and his urging of the audience to 'have a good time'; all provide illustrative examples as to why, as Žižek outlines:

(E)nthusiasm can only emerge against a background of terror; it is this background which as it were guarantees its authenticity, locates it into the relation to the Real and distinguishes it from false enthusiasm.³²

In choosing to close the gap of anxiety by performing in a vast carpeted 'void' between stage and audience, Seal's breaking of the expectation and intervention on proxemics appears motivated by an attempt to intensify the intimacy of experience for the dignitary front row. Arguably the impact of the decision was most pronounced for filming/streaming coverage of the event where teams of stage-side cameras can be viewed caught in crossfire of restricted rear and flanking filming angles on the singer's performance. Where Seal's seeming adaptation to the setting merely reiterates a sense of rigidness to a planned form of delivery, his performance conforms to Ngai's elucidations on the *zany*³³. In the unwavering commitment to his own live convention and authentic *persona*, Seal's sincerity can be read to have embodied 'something mechanical encrusted upon the living'³⁴ which was formulated by Bergson as an essential element of comic performance.

The chorus to Seal's *Crazy* - 'No, you're never going to survive unless you get a little crazy' - then provides uncanny ideological closure to the evening's variété. As Deleuze suggests, it is not enough to ask dramatizing questions³⁵, for example, 'what was it to sing these lyrics in Grozny at that time?' Nor does searching for antecedences establish why Seal, or any of the

³⁰ Auslander, 2006; 106.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Žižek, 2012: 835.

³³ '...however rapid or anarchic, in an aesthetic or formal manner; we even have a special aesthetic term – "zany" – for our complex "feeling for" this kind of exaggerated activity...' Ngai, 2012: 153.

³⁴ Bergson, 1901:84.

³⁵ Deleuze, G. 1967.

incongruous set of guests, were specifically invited to Chechnya. Such approaches only yields a projection of Kadyrov's 'sovereign tastes' and/or a speculative list of celebrities who might be considered willing/available/approachable to attend the event. As a UK/USA hit song in January 1991, from the dissolution of the Soviet Union through Putin's extensive presidency, in this duration between the original release of *Crazy* and Seal's Grozny performance, survival in Chechnya had been more than matter of a little craziness. In both the questioning of interests and values served by the performance of this song, as Deleuze advocates, and in tarrying with a psychoanalytic framing for reading the lyrics 'up-too-close' to expose an ideological function (as Žižek might write), Seal's closing number can be read as a song *for* Chechnya. Where 'craziness' is read as merely testament to having 'survived', a normalising of this exceptional state is presented in anthem form.

On the 8th of October 2011, in breaking a silence after the Grozny event and taking to Twitter at 4.40am, Seal (real-name Henry Samuel) responded to a short thread of criticism directed at Kadyrov's guests from username @apmxnet (Aleksey Mikhaylov). Within a stream of tweets 'reaching out' to the celebrities who performed in Chechnya, Mikhaylov had previous attempted to canvas Heidi Klum, wife of Seal at the time. Seal subsequently replied: 'By going there, I played MUSIC for the Chechenyan people. I'm a MUSICIAN... Leave me out of your politics'. A second and more sustained Twitter engagement proceeded from @BrianSpadora on 12th October 2011, with Spadora quoting the 4.40am tweet from its subsequent appearance in *The Moscow Times* online. On this occasion Seal replied to Spadora's accusation of cowardice with: '@BrianSpadora ... and you are a hypocrite! You sit there under your umbrella of democracy and never once stop to think how it keeps you dry!'. Seal's oblique riposte generated subsequent ridicule from Twitter users.

As with Hilary Swank, there is opportunity to make comparison between Seal's tweets after the event and statements during his performance in Grozny. Whilst questions of conviction and (in)consistencies are still relevant. Seal's attribution of the 'Chechenyan people' as beneficiary from his music, acknowledged his intended audience as a (psuedo)causal 'good'. As a means of eclipsing the political criticism, coupled with the detail of been left out of 'your' politics, Seal didn't fully assume an apoliticality, but instead attempted to sustain *sincerity* as a self-sanctioned, ethico-aesthetic, 'state of exception'. Iterative of an inability to recognise necessity for change and symptomatic of a mismatched perspective with regard to the ethico-political conditions of his Grozny appearance, Seal's tweets further reinforced the unmaliab

tendencies that belong to Ngai's aesthetic of the *zany*. With tweets buried beyond browsing on Seal's timeline and Hilary Swank's televised apology almost impossibly metadata-wiped from all available sources of digital circulation³⁶, such fragilities of web-based documentation present tangible advocacy for uses of off-line archival methods in examining the virtual performance of events.

Watching Ramzan Kadyrov through the event, he is seen as; visibly nervous in anticipation of the evening, humble in the presentation of flowers and whilst sometimes enthused in participation, on other occasions he is caught distractedly checking his cell-phone. A critical component of Chechen performance democracy is revealed in both a willingness of the sovereign to take to the stage and the accomplishment in his performance execution. Just as Putin's portfolio of acts from 'crooning to craning' represent his cult-of-personality-driven *siloviki* ideology, Kadyrov's own choice to dance a *lezginka*³⁷ is not without significance to the place of reconstituting folk (*Vanaikh*) traditions within the ambition to transform Chechnya's association with 'terrorism' into becoming a choice destination for 'tourism'.

Within representations of the reconstruction of Grozny as *modus operandi* in the project of Kadyrovisation, the broadcasted montages present the city within distinct and recognisable stages of before, during and after the contemporary conflict. The city as the subject of violence in an urbacidal equivalence to genocide then predominates over representation of human consequence. Where before the conflict, Grozny is depicted through historical documents of lively inhabited public space, footage of the contemporary city incorporates CGI graphics in which the people are absent. In fulfilling the *siloviki*-styled maxim to leave 'no more traces' of war, the rebranding of the city presents all forms of such erasure in the social sphere as an attempt to purge memories of the conflict from quotidian consciousness.

If fireworks to the opening sequence of Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra* seemed an inappropriate finale for a city that was bomb-blasted beyond ruin a mere decade ago, then in over-identifying with the ideological equivalences that are insisted through the event and

³⁶ I owe acknowledgement to David Saltz (ASTR2015 Traumatic Structures) for his discovery of this phenomena on various sites such as Youtube & Daily Motion.

³⁷ As a precursor to ballet, the *Lezginka* is danced on the toes and consists of a circling *pas de deux* that first spirals inwards and then out again. According to Berman, traced from sculptures of human and animals in the lezginka pose, the dance has 'roots in the Bronze Age' (2008: 89). Berman further notes the dance's 'association with the myth of Arachnid's web and the rescue of Theseus. In the first part of the dance the man is passive in that he only follows the girl, whereas in the second part their roles are reversed' (90).

through constructing the new Grozny as a 'traumatic subject', Kadryovisation might be considered as an accelerated and brutal process of, what Malbou terms, 'destructive plasticity'.

What destructive plasticity invites us to consider is the suffering caused by an absence of suffering, in the emergence of a new form of being, a stranger to the one before. Pain that manifests itself as indifference to pain, impassivity, forgetting, the loss of symbolic reference points.³⁸

With Grozny's avenues names changed to carry contemporary cult-of-personality political influence, for example where Victory Avenue has become Putin Avenue, and in the context of this paper, with the loss of its former theatre district, the new city dwellers are afforded little ability in bearing testimony to the 'terrible' conditions of its former identity and history.

When viewed and considered as propaganda, both the content of screened 'trauma' montages and dramaturgical placement of these sequences through the event duration further demonstrate a State solution to 'leaving no trace' of trauma. A point-of-view bomb dropping onto a dancing circle of children; operatic-infused heavy metal riffs; repeated 'war porn' footage of bomb blasts and ruined buildings, are then all set into relief by revitalising urban reconstruction. True to sovereign form; Kadryov is represented amidst the fear and pity; almost single-handedly managing the rebuilding; overseeing architectural planning and directing working sites, in a repeated picture economy of rubble transformed to luxury high-rise. Within another montage, screened during the staged dance of two warrior rivals, Kadyrov is presented as a spiritual leader parading state-purchased holy relics and engaging in a *zikr*³⁹.

Within the dances performed when Ramzan takes to the stage and screen, the growth of a new Chechen cultural economy is tied to cult-of-personality commodification and appropriation of folk (*Vanaikh*) traditions. No Saashkavilli 'Daddy Cool' of disco, though perhaps not so distanced from Western leaders and UN Spokespersons dancing 'Gangnam Style', Kadyrov's flare for 'Chechen Style' sovereignty continues to be matched by a 'lyconomy' of brutality and bestial crime. It is then in a pyrrhic conclusion, adding '*less than nothing*' to Politkovskaya's warnings, that Kadyrov is characterised through terms reserved for the 'werewolf' in Derrida's lecture series on *The Sovereign and The Beast*.

³⁸ Malabou, 2012: 18.

³⁹ Jaimoukha identifies this Qadiri Sufi collective circular dance and chant, often inducing of trance-like or ecstatic states in the male performers, as 'a potent symbol of Chechen resistance to foreign domination, and an expression of the deep-rooted yearning for freedom and independence. (2005: 120)

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