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# Vestiges of a genocide: terror and the sublime in the work of Pieter Hugo

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**ABSTRACT**

In this research dissertation I argue that Pieter Hugo's body of work titled *Rwanda 2004: Vestiges of a genocide* (2004) can be read according to notions of the sublime, in particular those of terror and the unpresentable. I begin in chapter one by tracing within the discourse of the sublime themes of terror and the manner in which certain sociopolitical events can be understood as sublime instances of terror. The essentially unpresentable nature of such occurrences is another important concern. As my focus is on the aesthetic produce of a visual artist in regards to such sublime notions, I make reference to various other relevant artworks and appropriate art theory.

In chapter two I argue the case for the Rwandan Genocide as a sublime political event, an instance of incommensurable terror. In an examination of Hugo's *Rwanda 2004: Vestiges of a genocide* I outline the manner in which his work, as an aestheticization of such terror, thus embodies notions of the sublime. Via the facilitated experience of witness, I note the manner in which the art spectator, in response to such work, experiences something of the shock and horror associated with the sublime. As a contemporary artist, engaging with genocide in Rwanda, I am careful to posit Hugo's work within the appropriate context of the postcolonial, as well as (in regards to sublime theory) the postmodern.

Chapter three examines a personal body of work, *Murder on 7$^{th}$* (2009) – an investigation into the neurosis generated by the pervasive influence of violent crime in South Africa. Having already argued the case for the sublime political event, I propose for consideration certain social disorders like violent crime, as well as HIV/Aids, as social incursions capable of precipitating the sublimity of terror.