

# Scenes of Encounter

From the Sublime Historical Experience  
to the Intercultural Sensation

*Symposium*

25-26 October 2007

Nieuwe Doelenstraat 16,  
Amsterdam

A large stone head of a sphinx is the central focus, partially buried in sand. A man in a dark, sleeveless tunic is kneeling in front of the sphinx's face, looking up at it. The background shows a vast, sandy desert landscape with some small, simple structures in the distance.

INSTITUUT VOOR THEATERWETENSCHAP UVA  
AUC CAIRO, CAIRO UNIVERSITY  
EXCHANGE-PROGRAM EGYPT/THE NETHERLANDS

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CENTRAL TO THIS SYMPOSIUM IS A DEBATE IN WHICH THE QUESTION IS RAISED WHETHER THE CONCEPT OF THE SUBLIME HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS SUDDEN AND OFTEN UNEXPLAINABLE EXPERIENCE OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT, CAN BE OF ANY INSPIRATION TO DESCRIBE AND INVESTIGATE THE ‘INTERCULTURAL SENSATION’.

This symposium is supported by the Dutch Embassy in Cairo, ASCA, Faculty of Humanities and the Leerstoelgroep Theaterwetenschap

*Illustration on cover:*

*“The interrogation of the sphinx” 1863*

*by: Elihu Vedder (1836 - 1923)*

*oil on canvas. 91,5 x 106 cm*

*Boston Museum of fine Arts*

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## **Thursday, October 25th:**

**9:30**    **Welcome and opening**  
by Mieke Kolk & Kati Röttger

**10:00-13:00**    **Travelling: on the shock and the enigma of  
strangeness in intercultural contacts**

“Strange indeed is the encounter with the other—whom we perceive by means of signs, hearing, smell, but do not ‘frame’ within our consciousness. The other leaves us separate, incoherent; even more so, he can make us feel that we are not in touch with our own feelings, that we reject them or, on the contrary that we refuse to judge them—we feel stupid ‘we have been had’”

Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1991

Participants:    Richard van Leeuwen (UvA), Lobna Ismail (Cairo University), Ferial Ghazoul (AUC, Egypt), Sara De Mul (ASCA), Lize Gosseye (UGent)

**15:00-18:00**    **Debate on the (sublime) historical  
experience as a model for intercultural  
sensations**

“We are all acquainted with David Lowenthal’s very fortunate metaphor that “the past is a foreign country”, suggesting that we experience the past as we might experience a foreign country. (...) It follows from this that we will be most open to historical experience when the experience of the past is reinforced by the experience of a foreign country actually representing (in the etymological sense of that climactic world) part of the past.”

Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 2005

Participants:    Frank Ankersmit (RuG), Caroline van Eck (Universiteit Leiden), Jürgen Pieters (UGent) Michiel Leezenberg (UvA), Yvette K. Khoury (Oxford U.), Christophe Van der Vorst (UGent)

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## **Friday, October 26th:**

**9:30** Coffee

**10:00-12:30** Contributions on the  
sublime experience in the Arts

Strategies of mimesis and construction lead to an appropriation of the event into something known and familiar. But, not being able to cover the whole experience of strangeness, the resulting combination of contrasting emotions and ungraspable sensorial experiences desire expression. Aesthetic theory offers many usable concepts: the Sublime, Delightful Terror, Epiphany, Das Unheimliche, the Abject etc.

Participants: Rokus de Groot (UvA), Antje von Graevenitz (Koeln U.)  
Christel Stalpaert (UGent), Kees de Graaff, Amr-el Sherif  
(Alexandria U.)

**15:00-17:00** Debate on the (sublime) historical  
experience as a model for intercultural  
sensations

A 'historical sensation' contains the moment in which the historian experiences a sudden and unexplained contact with the past - This notion may serve to renew current debates in Postcolonial Theory, shifting away attention from matters of discourse and representation, while turning towards the experience of the unfamiliar. It is important to acknowledge this dimension in intercultural contacts, which so often, far from home, offers 'home' in a foreign country.

Participants: Patrice Pavis (UvA/ Paris Sorbonne), Sruti Bala (UvA),  
Erwin Jans (Toneelhuis, Antwerpen), Marianne van Kerkhoven  
(Kaaithheater, Brussel), Ginka Tscholokova, Khalid Amin  
(Tetouan University)

**17:00** Closing session, followed by a reception  
in honour of Mieke Kolk