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Marijn Lems, 16 November, for Theaterkrant

Ant Hampton
Borderline Visible (Collective Experience)



ANT HAMPTON TAKES SPECTATORS ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY THROUGH THE PAGES OF A BOOK

In the stunning installation performance *Borderline visible*, Ant Hampton grapples with a journey from Lausanne to Izmir to reflect on migration, diaspora and genocide right through history.

As we enter the Red Hall of De Brakke Grond, folding chairs have been set up on the performance floor, with a book on each one. As in Ant Hampton's previous performances, theatre does not unfold in traditional ways: in *Borderline visible*, this book is the actual performance surface, and as a spectator you are at once reader and listener. Following directions from the voice-over (Hampton himself), we flip forward and back again, sometimes closing our eyes, thus exploring the pages.

The show's starting point is the journey Hampton and his collaborator Rita Pauls made from Lausanne, Switzerland to Izmir, Turkey - initially to trace Pauls' family history. Her Sephardic ancestors had to flee Spain and Portugal in the 15th century because of deportation orders for all Jews by Catholic kings, and fled to North Africa, West Asia and southeastern Europe.

Along the way, Hampton lets memories and associations flow freely: of his half-sister, who suffered from dementia and died prematurely; of the 1919-1922 Greco-Turkish War, which ended in a mass slaughter of the Armenian and Greek inhabitants of Izmir (or Smyrna, as the city was then called), and to Europe's murderous crimes towards the refugees now trying to make the opposite journey of the Sephardic Jews. He frequently links his historical and political musings to the *Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot's famous modernist poem, which in its focus on despair, death and destruction prefigured many of the horrors of the 20th century.

Borderline Visible is particularly strong textually; in its connection between the personal, the political, the historical and the literary, Hampton opens an awful lot of doors at once, and makes all manner of interesting connections between them. Not everything works: the middle section loses

itself rather in a superficial metaphor about birds, and a piece about forest fires due to global warming is also one topic too many. But most of the piece lays out an extremely engaging psychogeographical framework constantly enriched by Hampton's searching mind and razor-sharp political rage. The creator could not have predicted it, but in linking the humanitarian catastrophe of Smyrna and Eliot's apocalyptic descriptions, he inevitably conjures up the current genocide in Gaza as well.

Moreover, the whole thing is enriched by its unusual form. Hampton does not ask you to read the book in a linear mode, from beginning to end, but rather has you flipping back and forth to specific pages, as if it were a choose-your-own-adventure book. So we jump back and forth between the different stages of the journey, sometimes returning to earlier passages and images to see them in a new light.

Some pages are black, to better listen to the voice; sometimes the voice is just silent for a moment so you can read a text with attention. It takes considerable concentration to keep following both voice and book and not to lose yourself too much in your own associations, but that too underlines just how rich in meaning and emotional layering *Borderline Visible* is.

The project can also be experienced individually in IDFA's exhibition, with headphones on - but the beauty of the collective experience is that it does feel more like a live event, which increases the attention and urgency. In the theatre auditorium, *Borderline Visible* truly feels like a journey through space and time.