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## **S 62° 58´, W 60° 39´ - Franck Chartier / Peeping Tom Is there theater after the death of the director?**

By S 62° 58´, W 60° 39´ a boat finds itself stuck between the ice floes, and an artistic process ends in arguments and doubts. In this exciting tragicomedy, director Franck Chartier looks back on his work and the trauma that goes through it. Were his critics right? And is another path still possible?

At location S 62° 58', W 60° 39', Deception Island, a ship is stuck motionless between the ice. A boy in his underwear dangles his legs over the edge. Suddenly, a hand came out of the water and grabbed the little boy from the depths. A little later, a diver surfaces: the child's father, with the dead boy in his arms. The boat has lost radio signal, but the VHF radio appears to be receiving something. The father presses the receiver to his ear. Baby's cries fill the room.

This could be the start of a tragedy around mourning, but this is not the case for S 62° 58´, W 60° 39´. We reveal ourselves to be voyeurs during a rehearsal, and Romeu Runa, who plays the father, turns after a few sobs to the director, Franck Chartier, who is only present in voice. That he's tired of digging into his personal failures. To have his face buried again and again in relational shit, his own and Chartier's. Chartier later admits that the role of Runa was inspired by his father.

Then Runa speaks into the receiver again. "I am sorry, my son," he cries, "for missing your youth and for giving priority to my artistic career. » He wonders why he did this. By narcissistic desire? This is reminiscent of a beautiful essay that theater maker Willem de Wolf wrote for De Witte Raaf, in which he explains how it sometimes hurts him to put aside his desire to have children and concentrate on his job. Especially now that, at the age of 63, he notices that not everyone is interested in his "two plastic bags full of history of theater, art, and postmodern male, white, and male literature." cis elaborated".

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Chartier, director and co-founder of Peeping Tom, sees the same thing with this work. Should his gaze, that of a 56-year-old white man, still be central? The choice to name the piece after the coordinates of the Antarctic Disappointment is appropriate. The director looks back and wonders if he took a wrong turn. Were the critics right when they said it always pushed female characters into the victim's corner? And how does he – "Castellucci van Molenbeek", joke his interpreters – reconcile the spectacular settings with his ecological ambitions?

This introspection and self-criticism are particularly interesting for theater regulars. Still, this show should at least be entertaining for those who have never been to the theater before, especially since Chartier has "rebel performers" ask the critical questions. S 62° 58´, W 60° 39´ is neither an apologia nor a scathing defense of his own work: it is pure theater. "Deception" also refers to the many layers of the piece that mislead you. It is structured like a matryoshka: from a dramatic scene we fall into a rehearsal, which also turns out to be a staging, and is discussed again in a third layer. Peeping Tom mixes fact and fiction and compresses them, so that the whole thing collapses into pieces. Well almost. Projected English-language translations of the show, which sometimes anticipate the spoken text, reveal that all surprises are planned.

However, S 62° 58', W 60° 39' remains fascinating, because of the captivating and cinematic sound, but above all because of the great acting of the actors. The actors not only make fun of their director, but also of themselves. They therefore fight for as much attention as possible and are wholeheartedly attached to plastic accessories. Peeping Tom is known for its dance theater, but this time it's much more about theater than dance. Romeu Runa and Marie Gyselbrecht certainly excel in their physical and furious play. Chey Jurado and Sam Louwyck deliver perfectly synchronized comic intermezzos.

Chartier generally accepts his performers' anger and annoyance with resignation, but also exposes his own bullshit. When Lauren Langlois indicates that she does not want to continue playing dead, he questions her about her love life, until she bursts into tears and admits that she feels alone. "Good, now you can die," his voice responds through the speakers, "...and be born again."

Is this also what Chartier himself wants, to be reborn? When Runa has to play his father and Gyselbrecht his mother, it is he who drowns. Shortly after this death scene, Chartier brings to life a trauma that marked his career: how his father beat his mother. "It is perhaps the driving force of my life and my work," he told Bruzz. Here, this violence manifests itself in a rape scene. But when Runa fights evil during the "rehearsal", the director asks Gyselbrecht to rehearse the scene by herself. Suddenly, she is victim and aggressor, we see how she mistreats herself until she bleeds. "It's just a game," she said to "little Chartier."

The director's trauma thus takes on another meaning, which can be a springboard towards redemption. But what about his position? Rehearsals continue until the actors pretend to escape in a small lifeboat, leaving the child behind on the ice. What does this mean for the creator? And what is theater without a director?

There is no answer to this question, but all the questions come together again in a breathtaking ending in which a brilliant Runa runs across the stage like a man possessed. This shows that they reinforce each other, these bags full of history of postmodernist theater - with its now classic tricks - and the critical eye of the younger generation. Fortunately, the future of Peeping Tom appears to be bright.