

UNRULY



NARRATIVE REPORT

A PLAY BY
NEIL COPPEN
ANDREW BUCKLAND
DYLAN MCGARRY

FEATURING
ANDREW BUCKLAND
CHANTAL WILLIE-PETERSEN





This Report was compiled by
Dylan McGarry & Neil Coppen

2025

Funded by

Stockholm
Resilience Centre



FORMAS 

Formas – a Swedish Research Council for
Sustainable Development”
(grants 2021-00780 and 2023-0267)

© Empatheatre 2025

CONTENTS

Summary.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Synopsis.....	2
Research process.....	4
Production History & Impact.....	10
Review Snippets & Links.....	21
Media and Online Links	24
Credits.....	25
References.....	25



Summary

Unruly is Empatheatre's most recent production, created in collaboration with and based on extensive research in the Unruly Natures project. It explores the multi-layered conflicts between humans and urban baboons, a species highly capable of adapting to and exploiting expanding cities.

Set between mountain and ocean in Cape Town's urban periphery, this production explores the complex entanglements between baboons and people, and further entanglements in human society. Understanding these tensions surfaces apartheid legacies of forced removals, and questions around land tenure. Unruly also mirrors parallel developments globally, where regreening and rewilding of urban space often bring unexpected neighbours that challenge visions of peaceful coexistence between human and non-human beings.

This narrative report shares some of the findings and experiences as well as impact and feedback from the facilitated post-show discussions with the audiences that emerged from two tours in June and October–November 2024. These performances include shows across the Cape Peninsula to all baboon-visited neighbourhoods, as well as high schools, public town halls and churches. Audiences also included baboon rangers, municipal and conservation authorities, NGOs and civic groups. These post-show dialogues have helped audiences collectively interrogate the challenges of coexisting with unwanted 'others', the implications of historical spatial injustices, and the coercive social dynamics that drive polarisation and entitlement.

This project was funded by "Formas – a Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development" (grants 2021-00780 and 2023-02675)





Introduction

Unruly was created by Empatheatre, in collaboration with the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Unruly Natures research project. The production featured Andrew Buckland alongside double bassist Chantal Willie-Petersen.

Unruly is an immersive storytelling experience that emerged from extensive academic research into residents' own lived experiences and challenges of coexisting with urban baboons on the Cape Peninsula.

The production draws from research conducted by the *Unruly Natures* research project combined with Empatheatre's unique research and scripting approach, and follows the events unfolding in the fictional town of *Skemer Baai* after the matriarch of the local baboon troop mysteriously disappears.

Tensions run high as baboon politics divides a community seeking answers, but the play also invites the audience to empathise and explore the issue from multiple perspectives – painting in the process a rich picture of the Cape Peninsula's complex history and shared ecology of mountain, ocean, urban and military environments, prone to wildfires, seas surges and messy human/animal relations.

Through a captivating performance by Buckland and Willie-Petersen, Empatheatre tell a story that carefully tends to the human and animal politics playing out daily across the Peninsula and poses the question: "How should we, as humans, act towards a nature that doesn't always behave the way we expect it to?"

Buckland offers audiences a performance brimming with humour, compassion and his trademark physical theatre mastery and in the revised version of the production was joined on stage by award-winning Jazz performer and composer Chantal Willie-Petersen who accompanied him on the double bass.

Unruly was produced by Empatheatre and directed by Neil Coppen who wrote the script in collaboration with Andrew Buckland and Dr Dylan McGarry. Lighting design is by Tina le Roux and set and costume by Dylan McGarry.

Synopsis

Unruly follows the experience of Dr. Robert (Rob) Campbell, a disgraced Primatologist, who is in the throes of grief, after losing his ethnobotanist wife Sonja, to complications surrounding a heart condition. Rob and Sonja, retire to the fictional town of *Skemer Baai* and build a small cottage on the site where Sonja (a brown woman) grew up, and whose family was forcibly removed during the Apartheid Group Areas Act of 1950s.

While in *Skemer Baai*, Rob and Sonja developed new and unique relationships with their neighbours and with a troop of Baboons that frequent the area, namely the Alpha Male and Female of the troop, Eugene and Bertha.

The play spills across time, moving from the present, the deep mythopoetic past, and the more recent past, and explores the complex neighbourly relations, human/wildlife conflict, and the wider context of land rights, and land/human relationships through the entangled relations of Humans and Baboons. Throughout the course of the play, the main characters of Rob and Eugene, Human and Baboon, navigate a complex path of interpersonal and societal deception, misunderstandings and conflict that have direct impact on their personal and social lives, as well as examine wider and greater existential threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, the dangers of unmanaged resource extraction and late stage capitalism. Ultimately the play explores what it means to live in times of crises, and what we can learn from each other, from our past and from the land, as we move into uncertain futures.



Research Process

The play was developed over the course of a year using a phased and iterative approach. It began through a collaborative data analysis process where the Empatheatre and Unruly Natures team came together in Oct 2023 to explore the various findings of the initial Unruly Natures public survey a representative sample of over 500 households, as well as interviews and consultations with the Unruly Board, composed of volunteer citizens from baboon affected neighborhoods.

This workshop primarily examined the five major findings of the project (which can be found [here](#)), and then went on to develop a stakeholder constellation map, exploring the various players and people affected or involved in the urban Baboon/Human dynamic in Cape Town. This was then iteratively examined exploring power distributions across the map, through a power analysis of the several players.

After this workshop, the Empatheatre team, with guidance from the Unruly Natures team and the board, developed a list of follow up long form interviews with various players within this map. These included Baboon affected citizens (from wealthy and previously disadvantaged neighbourhoods), some members of the Unruly Nature's Advisory Board, representatives from Baboon management from the city, including Baboon Scientists, a retired Municipal worker, members of two different animal rights/animal welfare groups that support Baboons, Baboon rangers and other interest groups.

Alongside these oral histories and ethnographic data, the Empatheatre team compiled a 'research synthesis document', which comprised of popular media articles, archival research at the Simonstown and Cape Town Archives (historical and intangible heritage archival material), analysis of community Baboon Whatsapp Groups, and scientific/peer reviewed literature on the subject as well as field notes from the Unruly Natures and Empatheatre team.

Over a period of approximately six months, a collaborative analysis of this data, by the Empatheatre team, with ongoing call-and-response with the Unruly team was coordinated using Whatsapp, along with three iterative meeting/workshops, where we came together to explore findings and navigate the emerging picture from the rich thickly described data.



Concurrent to this, we also had specialised site visits with Andrew Buckland, the lead actor and co-writer of the script, which included time with wild Baboons, and Baboon Monitors. Andrew reflects on this role:

"It has been a singular ambition of mine to work with Empatheatre ever since I heard of their work. I was excited by what I understood to be their driving motivation which seemed to so exactly align with my own in making theatre work. To create spaces in which we humans can exercise and practice the skill of empathy; this seems to me to be at the very heart and core of the act of theatre. Combined with this was a life-changing experience I had had with my dear and very close friend Kate Jagoe who lived in Pringle Bay and had befriended a troop of baboons who would visit her every day.

I had the unique privilege of being invited to join her on the stoep of her tiny cottage when the troop arrived to hang out with her for a couple of hours. This utterly changed my view of coexistence with wildlife and sparked my interest in the baboon/human interactions which have been a feature of life in this area. When the two of these converged as Neil and Dylan invited me to collaborate on this project I was beyond excited and immediately agreed. The creative process has exceeded my expectations and I am in a state of bliss as we approach the very demanding few weeks before performance time. I cannot wait to engage with the audience with this material and with the interactions it stimulates."



Drawing from these experiences, including Andrews historical encounters with baboons from Pringle Bay, we developed a series of script writing workshops. Which included an intensive week-long workshop at the Bertha Foundation in Observatory, Cape Town. Here the core Empatheatre team worked on developing composite characters, a plot and a final proposed synopsis of the research findings with the Unruly Natures team dipping in on two separate days to contribute their thoughts and collaborative intelligence to the development of the plot and script. As Johan Enqvist (Researcher and project leader for Unruly Natures) explains:

"Combining academic research and theatre is quite rare but I see it as a really powerful way of talking about complex issues. Academic researchers realise more and more that science and information is not enough when it comes to problems that affect people's daily lives. By working with Empatheatre we hope to invite the public into our research, to discuss and learn together in an empathetic way."



This process was incredibly rewarding for all involved, but also very difficult and nuanced, as there were many aspects of the process we needed to take into consideration, moving beyond just academic rigour, but political, cultural, emotional and spiritual rigour needed to be considered in ensuring the play was provocative enough to open up dialogue, while at the same time not contributing to or inflaming any existing tensions within the communities the play was in service of.

From here Dylan McGarry (Co-director and Playwright) worked with Neil Coppen (lead Director and Playwright) to develop a draft script. Dylan, Andrew and Neil provided draft synopsis of the play as emergent story-lines for the play, from which lead dramaturge Neil, worked into a draft script, with iterative edits from Dylan and Andrew. As Neil muses:

"Researching and writing this play has allowed me to occupy a unique perspective that sits in the space between people and their surrounding ecologies. I thought I was writing a play about baboons when we started, as the "baboon issue" often gets described as human/wildlife conflict, but what I've learned is this "issue" spans deeper into our relationships as humans, and how often we misunderstand each other. It's more a project about humans and how we navigate our neighbourhoods, and how grapple with our own entangled histories to place."

At this stage the Draft script was shared with the Unruly Natures team for further iterative edits, and guidance, where careful discussions and dialogue were facilitated. This phase was a tense period of disagreements and negotiations, to navigate the construction of a play that did not fall into the trap of didactically presenting research, but moved beyond the current findings, and engaged with blindspots and unsurfaced realities emergent from the research beyond the survey (i.e. ethnographic and archival findings).

To ensure ethics of representation and figuration of race/class dynamics in the play (as one cannot mention ecological conflict and land related management in South Africa, without referencing the history of Apartheid, and post-Apartheid institutionalized systems) we drew on the support of Dr. Joanne Peers, an educational sociologist that specialises in the hauntological study of land and environmental conflict in South Africa.

Joanne was involved in developing and shaping the character of Sonja and her family, and navigated the political ecology of land/baboon and environmental management in the peninsula.





The complexity of this work, was rich, exciting but also very demanding, and tested all the researchers from both the Unruly Natures and Empatheatre team. It is precisely in this part of an Empatheatre research process where some of the finer, more politically rigorous sociological findings emerge and offered us great insights and to further deepen our capacity to collaborate and communicate across both the Unruly Natures and Empatheatre team. It was here the greatest transgressive learning emerged for us.

As Kinga Psiuk (Junior Researcher in the Unruly Natures project) reflects:

"It's hard to solve complex problems on your own but forming networks of dedicated people can be powerful way forward. This play creates a social space where these new relationships can form and ideas about future pathways can emerge. It's an opportunity to let go of something and possibly embrace something new. Together we are taking an important step in the unfolding evolution of baboon Governance."

From there, the final script was shared with members of the board and key informants we had interviewed in the ethnographic oral history phase of the project, where feedback could be taken into account in finalising and ground truthing the play, as well as identifying any potential blindspots we had as a team for how the play might land in communities and in what way we could edit or shift the story to meet these needs. While some of these comments were taken into account others were not included, as substantiated through further dialogue within the team. There was a delicate balance between meeting these concerns, while not taming the play too much that it would not evoke meaningful dialogue and further discussion in the post-show tribunal process, which acts in it's own way as a sophisticated large focus group, and a means to collaboratively analyse the findings with publics.

Once we were all happy with the final script, we began rehearsing and workshopping it for performance.

Working at the Theatre Arts Admin collective, we workshopped the script, with Lead Actor Andrew Buckland, and in this phase further iterations to the script and edits were made, mostly led by the principal Director Neil Coppen, but with feedback from both the Empatheatre and Unruly Natures team. Some key advisors, and partners who we had met along the way also attended some rehearsals and offered further feedback and iterative edits to the play.

Here we were ready to launch and tour the play.



Production History & Impact

(narrative on the two tours)

The first Tour

(1-7th June)

The first tour aimed to share the first draft of the play with as many Baboon affected communities as possible, and to get feedback from the post-show dialogues from community members of the plays resonance or dissonance with their experience, as a means to surface new insights, and support new emergent co-defined concerns. In many ways these performances were elaborate focus groups of about 20-80 people at a time, depending on the attendance.

The tour ran from 1-7th June 2024, with a short week long final rehearsals phase prior to the opening show.

The tour schedule included:

- 1 June (Ocean View Secondary School)
- 2 June (Kommetjie St Joseph Church)
- 3 June (Constantia Alphen Hall)
- 4 June (Simons Town – Town Hall)
- 5 June (Da Gama Park Educare Primary School)
- 6 June (Welcome Glen Rotary Camp Conference Hall)
- 7 June (Capri Living Hope Centre)

The tour as a whole was successful, at least for our intended aims, which was mainly to get feedback from audiences if the play resonated with the public. As well as to identify areas of contention that might need to be edited on ethical or mis-representation grounds.

Although we aim as Empatheatre to establish 'Optimal Disruption' (Wals, 2009), a transgressive social learning method (Lotz-Sisitka et al, 2016), which aims to disrupt the status quo, or the general narrative of a situation, outside of its usual boundaries, and transform public dialogue into a more nuanced and expansive form, that does not reiterate old tropes or misconceptions.

Some noteworthy moments from the post-show dialogues are explored here, although this is by no means an extensive analysis of the impact of the shows, nor of the the data emergent from the post-show dialogues, these are currently still under analysis between the Unruly Natures and Empatheatre teams.

Our first show at Ocean View, was intended to begin in what is the most low income community in our tour. OceanView a former resettled community, a product of the Group Areas Act of 1950, is predominately a Brown and Black community, a hauntological legacy of the forced removals from various sites around Cape Town. Economically and physically isolated, it was the main inspiration for our fictional town "SeaView Heights" in the Unruly play, which is the site that Sonja and her grandparents are forcibly removed to from their small fishing village of Skemer Baai. We were excited to get feedback from this community to see how the subversive narrative of Sonja's family would land in this community, as while we consulted different stakeholders from this site, and worked with archival data of testimonies of communities forcibly removed, in our research – it was important that culturally and stylistically we would get this confirmation.

Sadly, we did not have a large turn out from OceanView, and actually the majority of the audience was from outside the site. We would later get confirmation and feedback from other audience members at the Da Gama Park and the Welcome Glen shows. While this play was mainly written with the demographic majority, mostly white people of privilege, it was important to create a public pedagogical influence, that educated the blindspots in history of the peninsula, while the play was addressing tensions between humans and urban baboons, it was important to narrate the political ecology and history of the land tenure that underlies and holds the entire story.

In the Da Gama park show, we had an interesting intervention from an white female audience member from Welcome Glen, that critiqued the show for its timings, and accessibility for Black and Brown people, as well as the 'dangerous content shown' such as misconceptions that Baboons would hurt people, referring to a line in the play, where conservative and so-called 'baboon hater' Henk tries to convince Rob that Baboons hurt people (page 8):

Henk: "He's been zapped on so many electric fences that it fried his brain. That's why he's so...so...mal. You know what he did? And this is dinkum bru. He took a baby from a pram. A human baby Rob. Tore it to pieces with his bare paws... or hands...or whatever you call those things they have. It happened at a picnic site...years and years ago....some friends of an old school friend of mine had this friend who was actually there... actually saw it happen. Eye-witness account.

Okay suit yourself...

The play's performance, and text implies that its hearsay, and obviously not true, and rather depicts the ways that urban legends still govern much of the narrative around the Baboon 'crises'. Yet this audience member was very upset by this, stating that people had gone home after the play, asking if a baby was stolen from a pram. We later tried to corroborated this with Brown audience members who were on the same whatsapp group, where this discussion took place, and actually noted it became a useful teachable moment to discuss how these rumors spread, and in fact were grateful for the generative tension the confusion created. That being said, after this incident, we ensured in the post-show dialogues to re-iterate Henk's rumor was indeed false and that it was indeed urban legend and that no reports of Baboons harming humans and certainly not stealing babies have ever been officially reported.

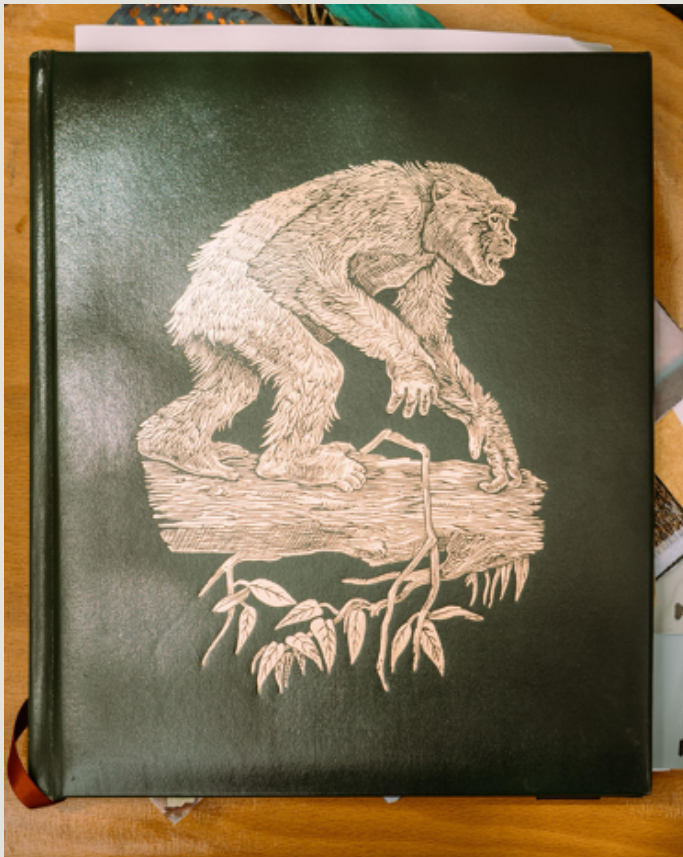
It is precisely these kinds of misconceptions, and re-writing narratives collectively, that Empatheatre supports more dynamic and robust forms of academic and political rigour to enter into public pedagogy and dialogue. One of the key intentions behind the production was to offer audiences—and our team members—the space to empathetically reimagine and re-evaluate our/their misconceptions and prejudices around the urban baboon/human conflict, and surface expansive questions and insights to address the crises. Coppen (2019) cautions against the didacticism that many Theatre for Development (TFD) approaches tended to favour, and as such Empatheatre seeks out opportunities for this generative tension to support social learning.

What did emerge in shows where communities were typically of a lower income or were mainly representative of working class communities, was concern for how much the “Baboon crises” had been exaggerated by more middle to upper class communities. One participant at the Da Gama Park show stated that they did not have the time, money or privilege to worry about such things, and just got on with their lives. That they had found ways to live with baboons, they knew their baboons and while none of them wanted baboons in their homes, if someone was caught out by a baboon raid, they were told: “Well that's your fault, you know the rules!” implying the silent rule of keeping your house closed and not leaving food out for baboons to break in and steal. A communal accountability to the relationship with baboons was prioritized in this discussion. This was later corroborated by other post-show dialogues in our second tour.

An interesting and unexpected dialogue that dominated many of the shows was the narrative of the “Land” – seeing the land itself as a key protagonist in the play. Discussions around land, including tenure, rights, historical displacements, occupations and contemporary concerns for the land's healing, reparations and capacity to survive the onslaught of climate change related disasters such as fires and flooding. We were surprised by just how resonate this narrative was with audiences, and how diffractive discussions would become around this generative theme. Discussions around accountability of residents to the land, in practical, political, cultural and even spiritual terms emerged.

Often emotions of shame, regret, and sadness emerged for the blindness the baboon debate had had on the political, racial and hauntological residues that underlie most of the dynamic around the so-called conflict itself.

Another topic of great urgency dominated post-show discussions, was the issue of social media and in particular Whatsapp community groups. Cited most as the main protagonist of the play, which was intentional in the script writing, the role of social media and online discussion platforms were seen as a key driver for miscommunication and conflict. The neighbourhood whatsapp groups were seen as either not regulated or monitored enough, or too monitored, and deeply polarized, with different whatsapp groups depicting and representing vastly different ideologies and positions around the issue at hand. While this was a common theme of discussion, it was interesting to notice that most of the time, the antidote to this space was recognised in the seated circle of the Empatheatre show design, with one participant naming it as the ‘solution made manifest here’. A space for deep empathetic and active listening, staying with plural ways of knowing being and doing in relation to the crises, and sharing an empathetic encounter. This became something Andrew brought up often in the post show dialogue, and shared his experience of learning this methodology himself, and how powerful the round circle space could be.



This is typical of an Empatheatre play which always aims to surface the intricate relationship between complex sociological and ecological entanglements with pathos, humor and theatrical magic, while also creating a critical and desperately needed third space (Bhabha & Rutherford, 2006) for public dialogue around co-defined concerns. This allows for narratives to be collectively reframed and offers a participative parity (Fraser, 2003) that is vital in ensuring participatory justice in relation to the concern. Particularly Empatheatre, in sculpting inclusive and participatory approaches public dialogue around the Baboon 'crises' it allowed audiences to move beyond talking 'about' the issues, and rather create immersive ways in which audiences can feel into them.

In our first show at OceanView a participant remarked on the power of a circle in public dialogue spaces that were laden with tension. He reflected on a Baboon public meeting, somewhere in the peninsula, where typical community hall-meeting seating arrangements lined the hall. As participants got more lively in discussions through the afternoon and the evening, the hall naturally shifted its seating into a more circular fashion. The role of this seating, and being able to witness or what Ettinger (2001) calls "wit(h)ness" each other's experiences while also watching the play, was cited as incredibly helpful in shaping their attentiveness and empathetic experience.



Using pathos, humor, mytho-poetic and idiomatic reasoning* (Mkhize & Ntšekhe, 2021), Empatheatre we argue has the potential to work with the raw materials of emotion, the experiences that are pre-verbal, a chill up your spine, goosebumps, the rising of tears or laughter, i.e. affect – creating what Brian Massumi (2021) calls an affective encounter in which emotions, feelings, and sensations shape our experiences and interactions with each other and the more than human world. In his work, Massumi (1995; 2011; 2015; 2021) explores how affect—distinct from emotion—is a pre-conscious and bodily response that moves beyond individual psychological states. He suggests that affect is about the intensity of experience, a response to stimuli that is immediate, embodied, and often outside of our full awareness (Ibid, 2021). An affective encounter is a moment where these bodily responses occur in relation to something or someone, often in an unpredictable and transformative way. For Massumi, these encounters are not just about the emotional responses we can label or describe; they are the raw, nonverbal, and often fleeting reactions that occur before emotions are cognitively processed. Over the past decade, we have honed affective encounter in our Empatheatre productions, deepening our justice work that not only practices academic rigour, but emphasizes the power of emotional, spiritual, and political rigor (Temper et al, 2019) in decision making and challenges the technical and instrumentalist framings of current public participation so-called ‘best practice’.

In reflecting on the methodology of Empatheatre, Luke Metelerkamp (researcher in the Unruly Natures project) noted : *“In an increasingly polarised world where anger and outrage are amplified in the digital arena, Empatheatre offers us a way back to our shared humanity. These live performances, and the research thats informed them, creates a space to sit with our disagreements on this thorny issue with humour and compassion. What audiences do with that space is up to them.”*



- Mkhize & Ntšekhe (2021) describe the importance of idiom in South Africa, as a form of reasoning and research. Idiom is used as a figurative generative theme, to work with embodied and embedded cultural wisdoms in relation to the very present and densely experienced present situation. Steve Biko (1978:48), a revolutionary South African philosopher and thinker described this practice of reasoning, which included affect, emotion, embodied wisdoms as well as mytho-poetic renderings of the world, as determining the ‘personality of the situation’.

The Second Tour

(28th October -9th November)

The second tour aimed to follow the aims of the first tour, which was to share a second draft of the play with as many Baboon affected communities as possible, and to get feedback from the post-show dialogues from community members of the plays resonance or dissonance with their experience, as a means to surface new insights, and support new emergent co-defined concerns. As well as expand the audiences to include other communities, who are indirectly impacted by baboons, or just live in the Cape Town area. The goal for this show was to explore the Unruly play as a potential public pedagogy and transgressive social learning tool, as well as research what kinds of adaptations would be needed to share this play with schools and other educational institutions.

We divided the shows into public and invite only shows. The invited shows were to service a particular group, namely the Baboon monitors or rangers, and the civil society and civic community that is involved in Baboon management from government to NGOs with the goal to create a more accountable and 'safe' space for dialogue outside of public scrutiny. This was to explore how might the play open up and create more generative discussion across areas of difference and conflict in the civics show for example, and also to create a sovereign and safe space for the Baboon rangers to share their concerns, experiences and hopes privately outside of their formal work life.

We also wanted this tour to support the research of PhD scholar Kinga Psiuk, who had different research questions to the first tour, and accommodating these in the post show dialogues, we decided that post-show dialogue facilitation would still be lead by Dr. Dylan McGarry, but shared and supported by Kinga. We also combined a theatrical run of the show at the Baxter theatre, would added theatrical elements like lighting and and adjusted score, as well as including Chantal Willie-Petersen to play the double-bass live alongside the score by composer Braam du Toit. This allowed us also to have the character of Sonja, present in the play, as a kind of spectral figuration of Sonja in the storytelling. Chantal is also a doctoral scholar in critical african feminism and arts-based research, and as a Brown woman who comes from a family who was forcibly displaced during apartheid could support the post-show dialogues that emerged around the land and the historical tenure issues. She, like Andrew, participated in post-show dialogues and shared her experiences in the making of the play, and could respond to questions that could only be answered by a Brown women.



The tour schedule was as follows:

Invited shows:

- 28 Oct: Constantia Waldorf High School
- 29th Oct: Glencairn: Phoenix hall 1st Ranger show
- 1 Nov: Glencairn: Phoenix hall 2nd Ranger show
- 6 Nov: Baxter Theatre, Civic show

Public shows:

- 30 Oct: Scarborough Community Centre
- 1 Nov: Simons Town Town hall
- 2 Nov: Kalk Bay Community Centre
- 3 Nov: Kommetjie St Joseph's Church
- 8 Nov: Cape Town Baxter Theatre
- 9 Nov: Cape Town Baxter Theatre (Matinée)
- 9 Nov: Cape Town Baxter Theatre

The second tour had many similarities to the first tour with many of the same generative themes emerging. Some notable differences however were the Baboon ranger plays, which occurred early on in the tour, and shifted much of our thinking as a team in response to what we had learned up to that point. While we were aware of the difficulty the rangers faced from the public around going about their work, we were not prepared for their post-show testimonies of the levels of racism, abuse and disrespect they had encountered in their work. During this second tour, it was also uncertain if the ranger program would be cancelled by the city, and so the shows were held an ominous undertone of insecurity and instability. What we learned in the ranger post show dialogues was extraordinary, coming to understand the incredible local ecological knowledge that sits in the ranger program and in the embodied practice-led enquiries facilitated by the rangers.

Their embodied knowledge of baboon behavior, ecological and general primatology was sophisticated and rich and could easily rival Jane Goodall or Diane Fossey's embodied more-than human ethnographic research. Two significant stories emerged of Baboons intentionally leading rangers to find a dead body on the mountain, and a story in which lost baboons trusted rangers and followed them to find their troop, show the very intimate and delicate relationality the rangers have with the Baboons.

We were shocked by the abuse the rangers faced by some members of the public, despite this public service they were providing. The rangers are predominantly Black and Brown men, and received unsolicited racialized abuse throughout their careers. Testimonies of their carefully learned sociological sensitivities, and conflict resolution practices were sophisticated and nuanced, and their ability to read conflict laden learning environments was particularly noteworthy. On reflection of these two ranger shows, we considered the emotional impact this play could have on rangers. From a technical level, because this play required special consent for Kinga's research, there was an unfamiliarity with the consent process in a circle, this in combination with the emotional heaviness of the play, and the need for better contextualization and potential translators, did leave us with some bigger questions on the impact of this play on the rangers themselves. We discussed as a team the importance of acknowledging the emotional toll on the audience that this play has, and suggesting a moment of silence to help process feelings, before engaging in the post-show dialogue.

These shows really created the tone of the tour, along with a performance at the Constantia Waldorf school which offered insights from young people of the play, and how they encountered the play. Their insights into the characters were useful and enriching, with some beautiful metaphors and articulations of the play's structure, plot and character design, that resonated in several contexts, with the land surfacing again as an important thematic container around discussions of privilege class, accountability and conflict transformation. With other discussions around climate change and ecological citizenship and responsibility.

A show that stands out is the Kommetjie show, which was arranged to be seated outside in a small olive grove. The play was interrupted by unexpected rain, prompting the audience to quickly adapt and reassemble indoors.

In the post-show dialogue participants discussed the emotional impact, vulnerability, and the importance of community and responsive practice, and how the adaptation of the play from outside to inside is a kind of communal responsiveness that is deeply needed in the Baboon action moving forward. Reflections in this show were diverse and engaged deeply with the politics of knowledge, history and political ecology of the peninsula. A man reflecting on the lasting impact of violence in South Africa and how it affects his responses to issues in the past have been influenced by this violence and the importance of holding oneself and others accountable when responding violently from a place of privilege.



The emotional rigour of the play, and bodily affect it induced was also discussed in this show, a participant expressed hope after a previous show but left feeling unsettled after this one, reflecting on the emotional impact of the event, which felt deeper in a second sitting. The group also grappled with the futility of seeking single solutions to community issues, and the need for diverse, multi-pronged responses. The discussion also highlighted the unique personalities and cultures of different towns, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.



In the Scarborough show, which stood out as it was the first time we had performed there, a rich dialogue emerged, mainly driven by the tension and tone sculpted by the presence of 'old residents' and 'new residents' with Scarborough experiencing a high increase of gentrification over the past 10 years, which according to the audience had increased significantly since COVID, with a big influx of people from the city or overseas moving there. This of course had implications in how people dealt with baboons and the musculature of the social tissue in the community, needing to recalibrate.

Issues with a WhatsApp group were highlighted yet again, which was usually for post-show dialogues, however a woman suggested pulling out of the whatsapp group discussion to refocus our discussion, and to consider re-thinking whatsapp communication entirely, citing it as the site of the 'real conflict'.



The rest of the tour was incredibly enriching, and dynamic, like the first tour, many profound post-show dialogues occurred. Sometimes going on for over an hour. We are still documenting and analyzing these discussions, and more detailed research papers to come will reveal the deeper impact of the play, and its contribution to further research creation and expansion of the research project.

At the time of compiling this report, Unruly has been nominated for three Fluer De Cap Theatre awards for:

1. Best Production
2. Best Performance by a lead Actor in a Play
3. Best Sound Design, original music, soundscape or Live Performance



Review snippets and links

Emotional intensity is omnipresent in UNRULY, a riveting new production devised by the Empatheatre team. In addition to the obvious theme of the play, secondary threads of narrative are woven into the work's dense texture, such as promoting empathy between divided communities, man's destruction of nature, materialism and the liberation that comes from renunciation of all things superfluous to a fulfilling existence. Despite this top-heavy agenda, the 90 minutes of UNRULY's duration pass with remarkable speed, due to the calibre of Buckland's noteworthy performance and Braam Du Toit's haunting original music, soulfully delivered by Willie-Petersen on the double-bass. This is a stellar example of Research Theatre.



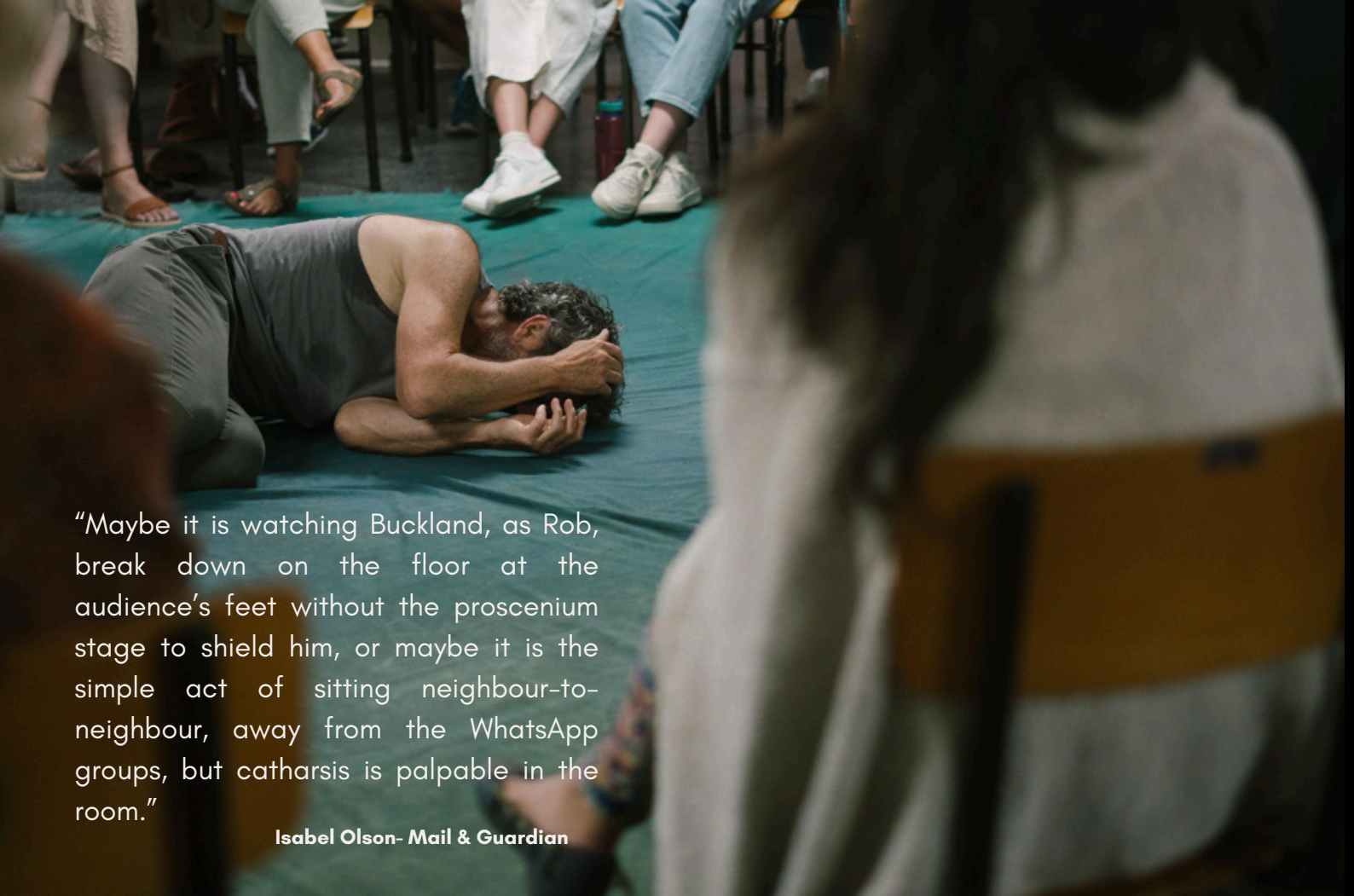
Beverley Brommert - Theatre Scene Cape Town.



"I am deeply deeply moved each time I am witness to the social realities that Empatheatre brings to an audience. This is theatre that is honest in its portrayal of the myriad 'subjective realities' that it contains – which comes through layers and layers of story visited by the team. And performed by the casts it invites into the process. After each performance, there is an invitation to engage with the subject. And often THOSE personal stories add other layers to what we've just seen. It's these 'subjective realities' that lead to the world we're in the process of creating. Empatheatre builds the 'social tissue' for a happier, more engaged world, where we SEE each other. On Saturday I watched 'Unruly' again (after seeing a preview some time ago without the bass and vocal accompaniment added to this production). If you missed it, it will be available again next year for a few weeks. Andrew Buckland reaches into the soul of the ape, and it will transform you!"

Actor Ashley Dowds (Facebook)





"Maybe it is watching Buckland, as Rob, break down on the floor at the audience's feet without the proscenium stage to shield him, or maybe it is the simple act of sitting neighbour-to-neighbour, away from the WhatsApp groups, but catharsis is palpable in the room."

Isabel Olson- Mail & Guardian



Media and Online Links

A new species of performance for unruly play about Cape's human-baboon conflict

Article by Isabel Olson

<https://mg.co.za/friday/2024-10-28-a-new-species-of-performance/>

1. Emotionally riveting UNRULY at the Baxter Theatre. Review by Bevely Brommert.

www.theatrescenecpt.co.za/post/scene-it-unruly-at-the-baxter-theatre

1. Short Youtube Documentary on Making of Unruly.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykPbsSSLnu4&t=3s>

1. On the couch: New project looks at human-baboon conflict on Cape Town's urban fringes- Radio interview about Unruly tour with Johan Enqvist

<https://omny.fm/shows/afternoons-with-pippa-hudson/on-the-couch-new-project-looks-at-human-baboon-con>

1. Play Explores Human baboon interactions- False Bay Echo.

<https://www.falsebayecho.co.za/news/play-explores-human-baboon-interactions-a49d60c9-0823-4067-b61a-31ce54e59608>



References

Bhabha, H. K., & Rutherford, J. (2006). Third space. *Multitudes*, 26(3), 95-107.

Ettinger, B. L. (2001). Wit (h) nessing trauma and the matrixial gaze: From phantasm to trauma, from phallic structure to matrixial sphere. *Parallax*, 7(4), 89-114.

Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in globalisation. Recuperado de www.eurozine.com/articles/2003-01-24-fraser-en.html, 1.

Lotz-Sisitka, H., Ali, M. B., Mphepo, G., Chaves, M., Macintyre, T., Pesanayi, T., ... & McGarry, D. (2016). Co-designing research on transgressive learning in times of climate change. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 20, 50-55.

Mkhize, N., & Ntšekhe, M. (2021). When amalungelo are not enough: An auto-ethnographic search for African feminist idiom in the postcolony. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 39(4), 534-549.

Massumi, B. (1995). The autonomy of affect. *Cultural critique*, (31), 83-109.

Massumi, B. (2011). Affect in the Key of Politics. *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, 8(1), 37-44.

Massumi, B. (2015). *Politics of affect*. Polity.

Massumi, B. (2021). *Parables for the virtual: Movement, affect, sensation*. Duke University Press.

Temper, L., McGarry, D., & Weber, L. (2019). From academic to political rigour: Insights from the 'Tarot' of transgressive research. *Ecological Economics*, 164, 106379.

Wals, A. E., van der Hoeven, E. M. M. M., & Blanken, H. (2009). *The Acoustics of Social Learning: Designing learning processes that contribute to a more sustainable world*. Wageningen Academic Publishers.

Credits

Duration 90 min.

Languages English

Age 14 +

Written by Neil Coppen in collaboration with Andrew Buckland and Dr Dylan McGarry

Inspired by research undertaken by Johan Enqvist (Researcher and project leader for Unruly Natures), Luke Metelerkamp (researcher for Unruly Natures project) and Kinga Psiuk (Junior Researcher in the Unruly Natures project)

Direction - Neil Coppen

Design- Dylan McGarry

Actor Andrew Buckland

Musician Chantal Willie-Petersen

Original score by Braam DuToit & Chantal Willie-Petersen.

Sound Design Tristan Horton



Andrew Buckland (Actor/Co-writer)

After tripping and falling into theatre as a student in 1974, Andrew has been active both as a theatre maker and as an actor performing in a range of theatre, film and television roles in both classical and contemporary genres. Highlights include three Fringe First Awards from the Edinburgh Festival, and the role of Sgt Pepper in the Las Vegas production of LOVE The Beatles for the prestigious Cirque du Soleil in 2008/2009. During his 49 year career he has also developed a reputation for creating an extraordinary range of cutting edge original work including *The Ugly Noo Noo*, *Between The Teeth*, *Bloodstream*, *Feedback*, *The Well Being*. These plays, together with his performances in; *Monday after the Miracle*, *Fuse*, *Breed*, *Crazy in Love*, *Tobacco*, *The Inconvenience of Wings*, *Endgame* and *Firefly*, have garnered a significant list of national and international awards including the prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1986.

Between 1992 and 2017 he played a key role in the Drama Department of the University Currently Known as Rhodes when he retired and was named Associate Professor Emeritus. Andrew continues to engage strongly in the creation of new works and is also a member of the creative team which devised a new work with the Phare Ponleu Selpak Circus Company in Cambodia for the Global Arts Corps. His on screen work includes leading roles in the telenovella *Legacy* for Tshedza Films, *Catching Feelings* by Kagiso Lediga and he has also received international acclaim for his role as Gerald in the feature film *The Fragile King* directed by Tristan Holmes which is now released through Amazon Prime.



His recent performance work in 2022/23 includes leading roles in *Hold Still* by Nadia Davids for the Baxter Theatre, *Oedipus at Colonus* for Magnet Theatre, *The Life and Times of Michael K* for the Handspring Puppet Company and the Baxter Theatre, directed by Lara Foot which presented at the Galway International Festival of the Arts and the Edinburgh Festival, and has since toured to St Ann's Warehouse in New York City and is due to play in Shanghai and other international venues. *Firefly* is a new work devised in 2021 in collaboration with Sylvaine Strike, Toni Bentel and Tony Morkel for Fortune Cookie Theatre. This work has enjoyed significant success through several seasons in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Chantal Willie-Petersen is an award-winning South African Jazz performer, composer, curator, educator, scholar, and activist for women's empowerment in the field of music study. Chantal was one of three black composers in the world to compose for the Carillon Bell commission by Professor Tiffany NG. She completed two master's degrees in music in Belgium (Master in the Arts, cum laude) and curates masterclasses and clinics nationally and abroad. She is a multi-instrumentalist, curator, musical director, mentor, speaker, and writer. She is featured on radio and television as a subject specialist regarding South African jazz, and around discussions on music, democracy, culture, society, and performance.



Neil Coppen (Writer/Director) is a renowned and prolific storyteller and theatre-maker hailing from Kwa-Zulu Natal. Coppen has won several major awards for his writing, design and direction work including Standard Bank Ovation Awards, Naledi's, Fiesta and Kanna Awards, the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Drama 2011 and the 2019 Olive Schreiner Prize for Drama. In 2024 he was awarded a Naledi (Isidlamlilo), Kanna (Die Swartmerrie) and Fiesta (Droomkraan Kronieke) award for the direction of three different South African plays.

Outside of his body of Empatheatre work, some of Coppen's most acclaimed works taught in schools and universities locally and internationally include Tin Bucket Drum (Published by Wits University Press), Tree Boy, Abnormal Loads (published by Junkets), Izipopolo, and NewFoundLand (published by Junkets) and his adaptation of George Orwell's Animal Farm which toured South Africa for over five-years and played two sold out seasons at the Market Theatre. In early 2020, Neil collaborated with Canadian First Nations dance company Red Sky Productions in Toronto on the premiere of a new work titled AF. More recently Coppen directed an ambitious online reading and reimagining of Hamlet which was recently awarded the Naledi Award for best online performance 2022.

In 2014 Coppen co-founded Empatheatre alongside Mpume Mthombeni and Dylan McGarry and has worked as the companies head dramaturg and director on the productions Soil & Ash, Ulwembu, The Last Country, Boxes, Lalela Ulwandle and Umkhosi Wenala.



In 2022 Coppen alongside visual artist Vaughn Sadie and in collaboration with a community of Oudtshoorn based arts practitioners founded The Karoo Kaarte project (supported by the KKNK). Karoo Kaarte is a large-scale public participative storytelling and archiving project whose theatre productions Op Hierie Dag (2022) and Droomkraan Kronieke (2023) and Die Swartmerrie were nominated for over 14 Kanna awards.

Coppen recently co-wrote and directed Empatheatre's hit play Isidlamlilo/The Fire Eater which premiered at NAF 2022 and is currently touring both locally and internationally.

Dr. Dylan McGarry
(Writer/Designer/Producer)

Co-founder of Empatheatre, Dylan McGarry is an accomplished Educational Sociologist, Ecologist, and Artist, known for his transformative work in various fields. Currently co-directing the One Ocean Hub, an international research project focused on reshaping ocean decision-making, Dylan serves as the Principal Investigator for this project at Rhodes University. His commitment to fostering change extends to his role as the co-director/co-founder of Empatheatre, a pioneering transgressive social learning practice. Dylan holds a transdisciplinary PhD in Environmental Education from Rhodes University, which included an apprenticeship in Social Sculpture at Oxford Brookes University. His (prac)academic journey has been marked by a deep commitment to research creation, creative co-engaged research, and innovative public pedagogy through storytelling and story-listening.

Central to his work is the use of public storytelling as a means to promote inclusive forms of governance in the complex web of social-ecological interactions. His research interests encompass Transgressive Social Learning, Public Pedagogy, Theatre-based Research, Arts-based Research, Queer eco-pedagogy, Posthumanism, new Materialism, and critical African feminist approaches to co-engaged qualitative analysis.

Dylan has also made substantial contributions to the field of 'ethics of care' research and transgressive ethics, playing a pivotal role in shaping codes of practice for co-engaged research. Throughout his career as a Senior Researcher at the Environmental Learning Research Centre, Dylan has focused on building collaborative research principles.



His work breaks down barriers between academia and communities, exemplified by his pioneering research methodology, "Empatheatre." This approach combines applied theatre, popular education, research theatre, transgressive learning, social sculpture, feminist ethics of care, and queer-eco pedagogy to facilitate inclusive co-engaged research. Dylan's creative endeavors extend into art, heritage, education, law, and justice. His work challenges knowledge hierarchies and has even been used as evidence in court proceedings in South Africa. Dylan's significant contributions have earned him recognition, including appointments to the National Research Foundation's Global Change Science Committee and the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation Research Advisory Committee.

