



punchdrunk
A Guide for Students
and Teachers

Punchdrunk

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This pack is not an exhaustive record of Punchdrunk's works and does not represent a specific show or rehearsal process. There is no one way to make a Punchdrunk show and the practice is always evolving to explore new genres and formats, and to challenge audiences in new and exciting ways. This resource has been compiled to support students, teachers and learners with their own investigation of Punchdrunk's practice and approaches to creating performance work in non-traditional theatre settings.

This pack also includes some exercises that offer students a way into their own devising process. These exercises have been used in Punchdrunk workshops and masterclasses and aim to offer various starting points for those who are keen to make their own work in the classroom and beyond. Exercises can be adapted, changed and developed to suit the project being explored.

Further reading and online resources are detailed at the end of this pack but the primary resource for anyone interested in learning more about Punchdrunk should be *The Punchdrunk Encyclopedia* by Punchdrunk and Josephine Machon (2018), which is the definitive book on the company's work to date and includes interviews and interjections from directors, designers, performers and choreographers from across the full breadth of Punchdrunk's work. *The Punchdrunk Encyclopedia* can be purchased online and details can be found at the back of this pack.

Written by Francesca Duncan with Peter Higgin
Design by Stephen Dobbie

About Punchdrunk and what is a Punchdrunk production

Since 2000, Punchdrunk has pioneered a game changing form of theatre in which roaming audiences experience epic storytelling inside sensory theatrical worlds. Blending classic texts, award-winning design installation and unexpected sites, the company's infectious format rejects the passive obedience usually expected of audiences.

The company is very well known for its epic mask productions, however this represents only one of the company's forms of work. The breadth of Punchdrunk's work is much broader, and this pack will explore three forms; mask, radical promenade and enrichment.

The company formed in 2000 with a small band of individuals from Exeter University Drama Department led by the artistic vision of Felix Barrett. The original mask form was born out of early experiments at university and has since gone on to reach audiences worldwide. The name Punchdrunk represents the company's ongoing ambition to make their audiences feel 'punch drunk'. This state represents feeling alive, alert, emotionally and viscerally impacted; all your senses firing and tapping into the core human instinct of fight or flight. How this is achieved continues to be explored through Punchdrunk's evolving practice. To date the company has created 60 projects in disused buildings, theatre spaces, across cities, in schools, care homes, museums, theatres, involving immersive technology and other mediums.

For Punchdrunk, all the world's a stage. The company's work is not easily categorised, actively defying definition, pushing boundaries and reimagining the possibilities of performance. We encourage those studying our practice to think as much about what is possible by embodying our principles and practice as well as discovering what has come before. Like all our work this challenges you to actively pursue rather than passively receive.

Mask Productions

'Mask show' is a shorthand for the large scale productions where the audience experience a world constructed within a vast building, through a looping narrative. As the name suggests each audience member wears a mask. This approach was first piloted in Felix Barrett's original production of *Woyzeck* at Exeter in 2000.



Photo: Julian Abrams

Key Mask shows include:

Sleep No More (London 2003, Boston 2009, New York 2011 - present, Shanghai 2016 - present)

Sleep No More tells Shakespeare's Macbeth through the shadowy genre of film noir. This was the first large scale mask show that combined Felix Barrett's direction, Maxine Doyle's choreography and Stephen Dobbie's sound design. The show has since been remounted in Boston, New York and Shanghai adapting and developing for each location.

Faust (London 2006)

Faust was an adaptation of Johann Wolfgang von Gothe's *Faust* reimagined in small town America. It was presented in a disused warehouse in Wapping, East London. The design approach expanded to fit the vast scale of the building, and the relationship between building, dance and audience immersion developed to create a strong aesthetic. Support for box office and publicity came from the National Theatre and helped secure the company's reputation in the wider theatre-going consciousness.

The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable (London 2013)

Inspired by *Woyzeck* by Georg Buchner, *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* was set within the demise of a 1960s film studio; Temple Studios. *The Day of the Locust* by Nathanael West and the films of David Lynch were important influences on the show, which cinematically explored the merging of fantasy and reality, of fakery, duality and manipulation. The production was staged in a disused sorting office in Paddington and was supported by the National Theatre.

Other examples of Punchdrunk's mask shows include: ***The Firebird Ball*** (London, 2005), ***The Masque of the Red Death*** (London, 2007).

Radical Promenade

Radical promenade represents a reinvention of the more traditional promenade theatre where audiences are led around a space or spaces moving from scene to scene. In Punchdrunk's approach the audience are cast in a role and become an active character in the journey. Generally speaking they move through a space accompanied by characters who interact directly with them. Although the work is heavily scripted and crafted, the audience have a feeling of agency and are often crucial in helping the characters to complete their story or mission. In this sense, they are cast in a role, and given a job to do, without them the performance cannot take place. This differs from the convention of a mask show, where audience and performers share the space, but the audience is invisible to the performers.

Key radical promenade productions include:

The Crash of the Elysium (2011, 2012)

The Crash of the Elysium was the first purpose-built portable experience for children and families that was devised by Punchdrunk for a temporary site. The project was commissioned by and first staged at The Manchester International Festival. It was later restaged with the New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich, as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. *The Crash of the Elysium* was a live *Doctor Who* theatre adventure created especially for children and families, that was conceived in close collaboration with members of *Doctor Who's* creative team at the BBC, including Stephen Moffat and Tom McRae. The production was inspired by the company's early enrichment work and helped develop Punchdrunk's approach to making radical promenade work. The audience were taken on a journey to save the Doctor, encountering alien spaceships, Victorian fairgrounds and Weeping Angels.

Against Captain's Orders (2015)

Created in association with the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, this adventure for children and their families reimagined the museum's stores as a magical, archaic labyrinth full of precious items from maritime history. When audiences decided to touch an object on display, a security lock down led them to make an illicit journey into the museum stores where they recovered lost objects and ultimately saved all of maritime history. The production was staged in the museum's special exhibition gallery.

Small Wonders (2018, 2019)

Small Wonders was commissioned by Punchdrunk, LIFT and Bernie Grant Arts Centre in 2018. Audiences were welcomed into Nanny Lacey's flat to hear about her love of storytelling and making miniatures; tiny handmade scenes of her experiences and memories. The children and their families were taken on a magical journey to help Nanny and her daughter Bella tell Nanny Lacey's last story. This touring production has since been to the Edinburgh International Children's Festival.

Other examples of Punchdrunk's radical promenade work includes: ***Kabeiroi*** (2017), ***The Borough*** (2013) and ***Moonslave*** (2000).

Enrichment

Punchdrunk's enrichment work takes the company's innovative practice into communities and schools, creating performances with and for children, young people and participants. Integral to the creation of these projects is the same commitment to exemplary design and performance that defines Punchdrunk's large-scale productions for adult audiences. The creation of *Under the Eiderdown* in 2009 marked a key milestone in Punchdrunk's development and inspired a new way of making work.

Key enrichment productions include:

The Lost Lending Library (2013 - present)

Punchdrunk's flagship primary school project is a magical travelling library which appears in a school as if by magic. The project aims to raise standards in literacy, speaking and listening. Every pupil in the primary school is invited into the intricately detailed library to meet the librarian, Peabody, where they discover an empty shelf waiting for more stories. The children are given temporary library cards and tasked with writing enough stories so they can become permanent members.

A Small Tale (2016 - present)

A Small Tale was developed as the first teacher-led enrichment project. The project revolves around two tiny people, Abe and Alba, who escape from their book and disappear into the school. The pupils find clues of their adventures - a tiny teepee, a zip wire, miniature footprints - but the only way to return them to safety is to entice them back into their book by writing stories. Teachers are given the training to deliver the project independently. Everything they need is provided in a custom-made box. As this project is so portable it can reach schools and pupils where it would not be practically feasible to take a resource heavy project such as *The Lost Lending Library*.

Greenhive Green (2016)

Punchdrunk partnered with intergenerational arts company Magic Me to build a bespoke experience for Anchor Trust's Greenhive care home. The creative team transformed a room into a beautiful village green where the Greenhive residents could take on the role of villagers and engage in a programme of workshops and activities. The project was carefully devised so that all residents, many of whom were living with dementia, could interact with the fictional world depending on their desire and ability to participate. Interactions ranged from drinking tea and watching others, to taking on their own characters and role playing the next steps in the project's story.

Other examples of Punchdrunk's enrichment work includes:

The Oracles (Primary school project, 2017), ***Prospero's Island*** (secondary school project, 2014).



Photo: Yaniv Schulman

Mask Shows

The Audience

Punchdrunk place the audience at the epicentre of all of their productions rejecting the traditional understanding of the audience's role. Whilst performances can accommodate hundreds of audience members, Punchdrunk push against the conventions of seeing the audience as one mass, and ensure that each individual has their own experience.

Punchdrunk experiences are designed to focus on the individual journey of an audience member which is not reliant on the presence of others (either performers or fellow audience members) as well as communal moments of sharing where everyone comes together in one space for the finale. Because audiences are given the autonomy to create their own journey no two audience members experiences will be alike. Some people may choose to follow a particular character, some decide to linger in a specific area, and even with an audience capacity of over 500 people there are some experiences that are designed for only one audience member at a time.

“...it’s the sparks that fly between the friction of two seemingly opposing text that create a Punchdrunk show.”

Felix Barrett

Narrative

A written source or text always forms the narrative arc of a masked show where it is combined with inspiration from film, music, art and other literary texts. Using a classic text gives audiences an anchor to the show that they might be familiar with already; for example *Sleep No More* is inspired by Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. This familiarity is important as it supports the Punchdrunk manifesto that the audience should be empowered to discover the experience themselves. As Barrett points out, **‘How can you empower them [the audience] if they don’t know what is going on?’** Indeed, when *Sleep No More* was remounted in Shanghai the company reworked the show to interweave Chinese sources so that the audience had an additional hook to help them through the performance. Not only does the classic text support the audience journey through a Punchdrunk show, the company’s reworking and reinvention of the text through a new lens, such as *Faust* seen through 1950s Americana, invites the audience to experience that classic text in a whole new way, unearthing new discoveries and readings.

For Punchdrunk the text is a starting point, a stimulus and a center point for the creative team to return to. In a Punchdrunk show the text or source will not be performed word for word, indeed in a large scale mask show text is rarely spoken, but rationalised through movement, design and soundscape preventing it from becoming predictable and anticipated by the audience. A device that is unique to Punchdrunk’s large scale mask shows is the system of loops. A ‘loop’ defines the unit of time that it takes to complete one narrative cycle. These loops are broken down into scenes which each follow a character’s narrative journey, often intersecting with other character’s scenes. Multiple loops will repeat before they reach the final crescendo where the full ensemble, and audience, will come together for one final scene.



Photo: Stephen Dobbie & Lindsay Nolin

Performance Language

Since *Sleep No More* in 2003, dance and choreography have been a significant element of Punchdrunk's large scale mask shows as the use of dialogue often creates a sense that scenes are delineated and have a start and end point. By freeing the narrative away from the spoken text the audience are allowed to explore their own journey, often encountering scenes half way through and leaving before they have ended.

Maxine Doyle, Punchdrunk Associate Director and Choreographer explains how the performing company use improvisation and movement tasks to explore the architecture of the building, finding frames such as windows, doorways, mirrors. Following weeks of rehearsals in a studio the performers devise sequences within the building, practicing what Doyle calls a **'multidimensional awareness - the space above you, behind you, under your feet or armpit, around the corner, the lift shaft above your head'**.

Another key principal of the choreography of a Punchdrunk show is directing performers to **'find your light'**; performers literally finding their light for their scene.

“Lighting the building always comes before lighting the action. It is this delicate duet of dance and light, dancing in and out of frame and light, which supports the audience’s journey through dark spaces.”

Maxine Doyle



Photo: Julian ABrams



Photo: Louise Hall

Use of Space

The term ‘space’ is often used in an interchangeable way with ‘site’ and ‘building’ to explain the place in which the production takes place. For Punchdrunk’s mask shows, the concept is often driven by an initial response, the ‘emotional response’ as Felix Barrett explains it, to the building. Where site-specific work often creates work in response to the history or heritage of the site, site-sympathetic theatre, as Felix Barrett describes it, is ‘an impressionistic response; drawing on similar impulses but creating a dream world within the space rather than practical, literal retelling of the space’. Exploring a space in great detail is vital when thinking about how an audience might eventually respond to it. As Punchdrunk aims to heighten an individual’s senses and levels of perception in a space, all details; marks scuffed onto floors or etched into walls, tell a story. Changes in temperature, light levels, ceiling height, fixtures and furniture and smell, all tell Punchdrunk about the history and story of a building and give a framework for the whole creative team to work from. For example the choreography collaborates with the architectural features and impressions provided by the space and gives the performers an immediate context to start working in.

One-on-One

One-on-One or One-to-One experiences are performances that are designed for one audience member and explores the direct connection between performer, audience and space. Within Punchdrunk's mask shows, the One-on-One is a mini show in itself that takes one audience member on a journey. The One-on-One demonstrates an exciting dynamic between the performer and audience member as it is the one moment when the character 'sees' the audience. As a general rule this only happens if characters are magical, ghosts, or in a state of madness. These One-on-One interactions are planned but their success relies on the performer being sensitive to the audience member's reactions as they are a meaningful contributor in this micro performance. Individual audience members often leave these performances by being gifted a momento; a little something to remember their interaction by.



The Mask

The mask is considered such a signature aesthetic of a large-scale show that these events have come to be known as 'mask shows'. The function of the mask is multifaceted: to provide anonymity, to prevent communication between audience members and to show the distinction between performers and the audience. When an audience member is wearing a mask it can give them the freedom to make decisions. In an enrichment production, or where the audience are tasked with a mission in radical promenade, such as *The Crash of the Elysium* or *Kabeiroi*, masks are not used.

Photo: Stephen Dobbie



Photo: Stephen Dobbie

Radical Promenade

The Audience

The audience in a radical promenade production is arguably more like a character, sometimes playing a supporting role and sometimes the protagonists. Without the audience the story cannot be driven forward or completed. Although playing a role, audiences are not expected to learn lines or to come to rehearsals. The piece casts them as a version of themselves and the journey they go on often reveals they are heroes or have powers or skills that are vital in helping characters complete a mission or advance a key part of the narrative. In *The Crash of the Elysium* the young audience had to help two soldiers board an alien spaceship and save Doctor Who and the world from Weeping Angels. In *Small Wonders*, Nanny Lacey needs the children's imagination to help her shrink into her miniature worlds and go on her final adventure. There is no delineation between performer and audience and they are able to speak and interact. For this type of production to be successful it is important to establish the role of the audience, and why the characters need them to be present. This relationship is important in distinguishing the work from a conventional promenade production.

**“I must warn
you this
adventure
will be the
greatest
test of your
imagination
yet!”**

Nanny Lacey, *Small Wonders*

Narrative

In radical promenade the narrative has to make sense of the interactive nature, and although storytelling and script is highly crafted, the narrative and performance style has to be flexible and allow for interjections and suggestions from the audience. In radical promenade the narrative is linear, although when at its best, audiences feel like they have agency over their experience. The form has the ability to have branching narratives and multiple outcomes, but creating work in this way is highly complicated. As performances are usually an hour, narrative set-ups have to be easily understood and communicated quickly. The audience do not have time to take on complex narratives, whilst trying to position themselves and their role within it. Narratives often centre around characters needing the audience: in *Against Captain's Orders*, audience's knowledge of objects is needed. In *Small Wonders*, Nanny Lacey can only complete her final story with the help of the audience imagination

Use of space

Radical promenade productions can take place in a number of different spaces, specially designed and adapted for the project. *Against Captain's Orders* was a constructed installation, a series of rooms and interconnected corridors, that gave the illusion of a much larger space. *Small Wonders* is a production that is designed to be housed in a traditional theatre and although the audience never see the auditorium, the installation houses the lobby of a council flat, living room and kitchen, a shrinking corridor and a magical forest installation. These sets are highly detailed spaces, that feel real and have ceilings and doorways that suggest the space extends onwards. *The Crash of the Elysium* was housed in a series of containers and plastic tunnels, with a number of the production's set pieces inside tents and marquees (although this was either hidden from the audience or made sense of within the narrative). The project was staged twice, once in an outdoor construction storage yard and then in a multiple storey car park. Traditionally these productions haven't taken over found spaces, but it is completely possible for this form to do so. Similarly they can take place in the real world across a multitude of smaller spaces. *Kabeiroi* took audiences across London using the streets and a number of everyday spaces: a museum, a pub, a storage facility, on public transport. *The Borough* was a headphone experience that used the form of a walking tour audio tour to guide audiences through the village of Aldeburgh. This form is ripe for reinvention and offers a multitude of possibilities in an endless list of spaces.

“Discovery is key to the success of any Punchdrunk project, really you want the audience to feel like they are discovering things alone for the first time”

Peter Higgin

Performance language

In projects like *Small Wonders*, *Against Captain's Orders* and *The Crash of the Elysium* performers speak and interact with the audience. It is important that language is realistic and that the characters are believable and not overplayed or caricatured. Performers are often cast for their likeability, ability to think on their feet and to improvise (despite performances being highly scripted, the ability to improvise makes the story responsive and the audience interaction genuine). The acting must be very natural, you want the audience to believe their character and not focus on the actor. This is why it is important to contextualise the character/audience relationship. This type of performance is all consuming for performers; the interactive nature of sharing a space, being responsive to audiences and often managing children's emotions means that it is physically and emotionally demanding. Performances typically last an hour and for the most part performers are acting and interacting for the entire time, whilst also performing crowd management duties all seamlessly and sincerely worked into their role. As with any Punchdrunk production there is no backstage or easy exit into the wings.

Making work of this nature involves a collaborative approach between directors, writers, designers and production teams to help devise, create and realise an idea. It is important to have everyone in the room, so that story, design and logistics all align; ensuring the idea is affordable and can be safely managed.



Photo: Paul Cochrane



Photo: Paul Cochrane

Enrichment

Punchdrunk's enrichment work takes the same principles of creating extraordinary experiences for audiences and translates this into projects for schools, families and community groups. As Punchdrunk's approach, aesthetic and mission are distilled for a specific audience, the enrichment work has become an incubator of ideas where research and the discovery of new practices can inform the rest of the company's work. As with all Punchdrunk experiences the defining characteristic is that these immersive worlds are created 'as a story that happens to you'.

Audience

Unlike the large scale mask shows, the audience in enrichment work is always cast as themselves. For enrichment projects the performer / audience relationship is redefined, as the audience do not know the characters they meet are actors, or anything about Punchdrunk's involvement. Director of Enrichment, Peter Higgin, explains that for community projects taking on a 'character' can feel alienating when 'the key is that the experience has the potential to be transformative and cast them as a version of themselves that they didn't know existed'. For this reason Punchdrunk would never use masks in an enrichment project. Alternatively, the audience is given a responsibility and a purpose; the stakes are high and their role is totally integral to the development of the adventure ahead. For example in *The Lost Lending Library* as the children experience the library in small groups without a teacher they become experts when they return to the classroom. The children take responsibility for the task they are given - to write stories that will populate the empty shelf - and to describe their experience to their teacher. The inversion of this traditional hierarchy leads to a sense of empowerment and they are driven to want to achieve something that they might not have previously thought possible. All schools-based enrichment projects are created with a key curriculum-based objective in mind; the young people are learning without realising they are doing so. The characters and their story give the children a reason to engage with the curriculum areas from reading and writing, to using their maths and logic skills to solve a mystery. The transformative experience has a measurable and palpable impact on the child's personal development and attainment, giving them a sense of achievement that can directly be translated into other areas of their learning and interactions with others.

Space and world

Most enrichment projects have an installation or transformation of space at their heart. An installation loosely refers to any design experience into which audiences enter and are surrounded by the work and able to interact directly with it; for example the Library in *The Lost Lending Library* or the Greenhive Committee Room in *Greenhive Green*. The design of the building based installations follow exactly the same 360 degree design principals as large scale mask shows, just on a smaller scale. In order for the magic to feel genuinely exciting the logic of the fictional world must be totally watertight. It is often an object, such as a book or a letter, that invites the audience to cross the threshold from their familiar world into somewhere more extraordinary. These objects are often rare and unusual things that add mystery and curiosity to the experience and the more authentic the object feels, the more

believable the experience becomes. For *A Small Tale*, it is not an installation but instead small design interventions that heighten the children's perspective on their school as they search for Abe and Alba. As Punchdrunk Associate Enrichment Director Tara Boland explains 'you can do something very powerful by making children believe that their environment has been changed... If you take away the walls of an installation but allow another world to leak into the everyday, a child will imagine that their whole world has changed.'

Narrative

Books are often used as a starting point for both the creative team developing an enrichment project and as a shared interest between the character and the audience. Punchdrunk were inspired by *How to Live Forever* by Colin Thompson when creating *The Lost Lending Library* and the book is now the start of a conversation between the children experiencing the project and Petra, the visiting librarian. In *A Small Tale* it is the book, *The Adventures of Abe and Alba*, which is the pupil's first interaction with the project and the catalyst for the storyworld colliding with their own. Enhancing the importance of books in children's minds helps support the wider learning aims beyond the life of the project of encouraging a passion for literature and storytelling. Myths and folklore also provide a rich world in which projects can start to be developed.

Performance Language

Enrichment experiences always start in the real world with a strong feeling of reality and any theatricality is kept to an absolute minimum. Within transformative installation based worlds such as *The Lost Lending Library* it is important that the audience believe the character in front of them and do not see the actor or the mechanics of performance. As in radical promenade performers often are required not only to be excellent storytellers, but interact with children, facilitate workshops, trigger technical effects and stage manage their audience. Whilst enrichment projects often use professional performers who play characters to push forward the narrative, such as the librarians Petra and Peabody in *The Lost Lending Library*, some projects are led by teachers. In this instance Punchdrunk empowers teachers to deliver the project in their school and the teachers are supported by a day of training. *A Small Tale* and *A Curious Quest* are teacher-led adventures that are born from a desire to allow teachers to be seen as magical by their class. By putting teachers at the centre of the creative delivery the fantastical world that starts to emerge for the children is given authority as it is introduced by someone they know and trust.

In *Greenhive Green* the performer-facilitators took on light performative personas rather than playing full characters to interact with the residents of Greenhive care home. Using their own names, and a suggestion of a costume, the performer-facilitators were able to adapt the level of role-play based on how willing and able the residents were to engage with the story and activities each day. The crucial shift here was that whereas most enrichment projects are preoccupied with ensuring that the participants believe the world created is real, for the participants of *Greenhive Green*, many of whom were living with dementia, it was important to remind them that it was not.

Gifts

Just as an audience member in a mask show is often gifted a memento at the end of a one on one, participants who experience Punchdrunk's enrichment and radical promenade projects will come away with a gift. As the children leave *The Lost Lending Library* they are given a library card to mark their visit and told that this card will be upgraded to a gold library card should they write enough stories to populate the empty shelf. After a few weeks of frantic story writing the children receive a package in the post containing their gold cards which make them permanent members of the Library. At the end of *Small Wonders* Bella gives every child an envelope which has been left by Nanny Lacey. The envelope contains a tiny thank you letter from Nanny with an item of 'scrapgic' (scrap/magic) to start them on a journey to making their own miniatures. Whatever the object, no matter how small, it leaves the participant with a reminder about their experience, the characters they have met and the journey they have been on.

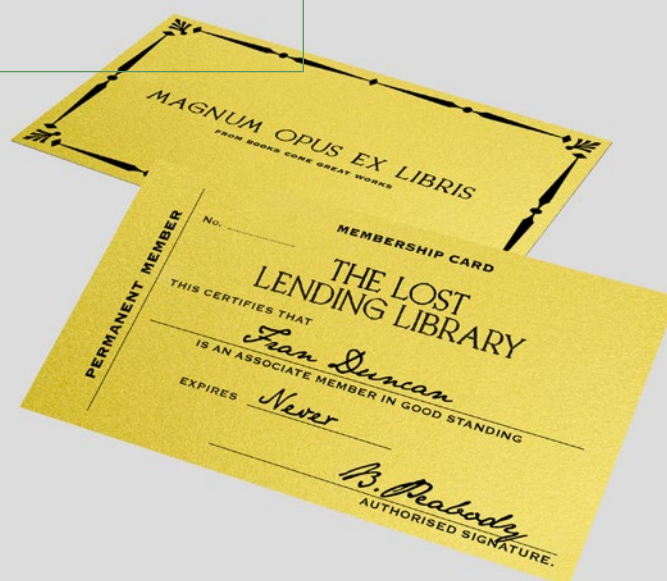




Photo: Stephen Dobbie

Stagecraft

Every Punchdrunk world is created through the orchestration of multiple theatrical elements including lighting, soundscape, design and special effects all carefully conceived to leave the audience feeling ‘punch drunk’. Felix Barrett explains that Punchdrunk’s practice, in essence, is concerned with ‘atmosphere and audience’: ‘It’s the crackle of tension. The electrical charge. A feeling that the audience experience ambiently. It’s a threat. Its being able to feel particles collide.’



Photo: Stephen Cumminskey

Sound Design

In a Punchdrunk show the sound design is composed of the soundscape, the full aural composition which can include narration, music and abstract sounds, and the placement of speakers to control the direction of sound throughout the entirety of the space. Punchdrunk's Creative Director Stephen Dobbie designs the soundscape for many of the company's projects to create a montage of sound. Music can be used to evoke a particular time period or geographical setting. Abstract sounds help to layer in a feeling of a dreamlike state, and orchestrated interludes punctuate emotional threads in the narrative of the show. On a practical level, the soundscape is used by the performers to navigate their timings within a story, show or scene. The soundscape is key in manipulating how audiences feel. A Punchdrunk show without a soundscape would be like watching a horror or action film - *Jaws*, for example - with the sound turned down; the tension and atmosphere is lost when you lose the iconic 'shark theme', written by John Williams, signaling the shark approaching.

When choosing music to sample, authenticity is key as the objective is for the sound to deepen the audience experience and never to pull them out of the immersive experience. Be aware that some music may conjure up other connotations outside of the world that you are creating, whereas melody-less music gives space within the sound design for the sound to become omnipresent, to wrap around the whole experience. Film scores are useful as they contain periods of minimal music which can be easily looped and repeated to continue the tone that has been set. For the same reason, music from Ballets and Operas, which are written to tell a story of their own, prove more problematic to use and perhaps only short sections can be used. Contemporary music can be used to separate a moment and mark a scene that feels like it is in a slightly difference sphere. In other moments, such as in a One-on-One it is important that the music does not distract from the intense dynamic created between performer and audience. As Stephen Dobbie explains 'the impact is greater when the audience are unaware of the soundscape until we decide to draw it to their attention'.



Photo: Stephen Dobbie

Lighting

Light creates atmosphere and focuses attention, slowing audience members down on their journey. In a promenade show, lighting can also be used as a tool to encourage audience members down dark corridors to find installations and sequences of action.

A signature lighting device for the company is the smart candle. Smart candles are little led rechargeable battery operated lights that mimic the colour and quality of candlelight. In addition to the stage lighting that changes with the action as performers move in and out of space and the domestic 'in world' light such as lanterns and lamps that dress the rooms, the smart candles are dotted throughout the set to draw audience focus to specific details. A smart candle in the corner of a dark room encourages audiences to be brave and venture through the space. Felix Barrett explains; "Darkness immediately intensifies an event, amplifies its impact. It reawakes that childlike fear of the dark...Switch the lights off and suddenly the space transforms, it moves from the familiar to the unknown in one second."

For enrichment projects light levels often need to be flexible. There is a balance to strike in which darkness is used to heighten atmosphere but for younger years, or children with special educational needs, a space that is too dark would be so scary that they are not able to engage with the experience. Equally, for a project such as *Greenhive Green* the space needs to be light enough for the older residents to be able to see.

Design

There are a number of considerations when thinking about Punchdrunk's design process; the way in which the building or site is responded to, the set design of the space, the interior design of any structures or rooms and the instillation art. Design roots the audience in a particular era or environments and activates a space, communicating character, narrative and themes. The design influences how performers and audience members interact in the space and practical technicalities always need to be considered. If a performer is going to be dancing on top of a piece of furniture, or if children are going to be clambering over it day after day, night after night it will need to be able to withstand this impact.

At the centre of Punchdrunk's design practice is the audience journey and how a dramaturgical crescendo can be built through a non linear, non traditional theatre space. From installations that inhabit a whole room, subtle design interventions appearing in a school, or a large scale theatrical set across a whole building, design creates a 360 degree world that is authentic, otherworldly and activates all five senses.



Photo: Stephen Dobbie



Photo: Paul Cochrane

Dressing

The term ‘touch-real’ is used by Punchdrunk’s designers to describe the level of detail to which the design is researched and installed. The installations need to be ‘touch-real’ as this invites the audience to interact with it; to rummage through draws, to look in cupboards, to sit on the beds. The attention to the level of detail is intrinsic to all Punchdrunk projects as it evokes a real sense of place and space. Barrett explains that Punchdrunk’s work is ‘experience design’ rather than ‘visual design’ focusing on both the macro; the whole building and the micro; a handwritten letter on a desk. Whilst the dressing is often driven by character, sometimes it becomes a narrative element of it’s own, often abstracted through repetition. For example in *The Masque of the Red Death* there was a room within which every single surface was dressed with medical prescriptions. This hyper-realism, combined with the detailed installations create a dramaturgical tension, leaving the audience not knowing what to expect when they turn the next corner.



Photo: Brinkhoff Møgenburg

Objects

Traditional theatre design includes the making of ‘props’ but for Punchdrunk these hand-held objects are a layer of dressing. In Punchdrunk’s work objects are an important part of the scenic installation and due to their mobile nature can be interacted with by both performers and audience members. These tactile and detailed objects give a strong sense of character and with personal possessions or letters they draw the focus and give clues about the characters they belong to. Within the immersive world of a mask show performers will devise detailed sequences around a prop or object, such as Mr Stanford in *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* grating a small horse made of sugar. This repetitive movement might not make sense in isolation but exist in a dreamlike state and provokes curiosity in the audience. In Punchdrunk’s enrichment work, objects can act as a portal to the fictional world; such as the book that unlocks the bookshelf to reveal the *Lost Lending Library*. When Petra, the librarian, arrives in school with her bag of books it immediately sparks curiosity in the children and starts to blur the lines between the real and immersive worlds.



Photo: Julian Abrams

Costume

For Punchdrunk costume is seen as firmly embedded within the intricate design aesthetic of the immersive world. In the same way as the set and dressing, audience members are so close to the performers the costume has to feel authentic. Whereas in traditional theatre there may be opportunities to hide and pin costume to sit a certain way a Punchdrunk costume will be seen from all angles and is often close enough to be touched. Not only this but the costume has to be designed and made to withstand many hours of physical performance and movement without time for reinforcement.



Photo: Julian Abrams

Smells

To transport audiences into the heart of stories Punchdrunk uses smells within their design instillations. From the smell of dusty old books, to fresh linen, to the waxy smell of lipstick, distinctive scents help to add detail to the in-show world and are a key element to any Punchdrunk show. In the hospital in *Sleep No More*, where Lady Macbeth is bathed by a nurse, the air hangs with the stench of TCP. The distinctive smell of antiseptic is unmistakable and immediately situates the audience in a clinical and medical space. The scent of *The Lost Lending Library* is a careful concoction of smells; dust, old vinyl, tobacco, and grass which are combined to mimic the unmistakable essence of old books.



Photo: Julian Abrams

Haze

Haze is a form of theatrical smoke used (by Punchdrunk) especially in large-scale shows to make a subtle fog through which shards of light blur the corners of your vision. Through this fog performers are able to appear and disappear; an unnerving special effect on the audience that implies that even in a quiet moment they might not be alone. Without knowing what is beyond the fog, audiences slow down and consider the space between them and the performer. Haze is also an integral component to the lighting design as it heightens the architectural quality of light.



Photo: Julian Abrams

Water

At its essence, in creating a new world, Punchdrunk are recontextualising the elements - water, air, fire and earth - for their audience. Water is a recurring motif throughout Punchdrunk's work from the flooding of a whole archway in *Tunnel 228*, to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth washing the blood from their bodies in *Sleep No More*, to the shower of rain and the pools of water in *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*. Water is elemental and evocative in the sensation it creates. From a pool of water that a character is immersed in, to the unwavering sound of a drip, water helps hook the audience into a new world that feels, sounds and smells real.



Photo: Stephen Dobbie

Magic

The Masque of the Red Death employed several magic tricks and engaged a magic consultant on the production. Most notably in the finale sequence the character of the Red Death entered the ball room, a hooded figure draped in a long black cloak walked straight up to Prospero who grabbed them by the shoulders. After a few beats, Prospero whisked the cloak away and the Red Death had seemingly disappeared. Other magic tricks in the production included a series of cabaret magic tricks performed by the cabaret MC and also a one to one where clear water turned blood red as a nurse massaged an audience members hands. In *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*, a performer disappeared into a phone booth, never to reemerge and in *The House Where Winter Lives*, a coal shed transformed into a magical larder. The use of these illusions and reveals combined with the use of space and experiential storytelling and stagecraft, adds a sense of wonder and magic to what is already a heightened experience, adding to the sense of feeling 'punch drunk'.



Photo: Paul Cochrane

New technology

An emerging narrative device in the Punchdrunk toolkit is the use of technology. As integral as sound and lighting, technology can be used to add a new and exciting dynamic to the story. Punchdrunk are experimenting with the possibilities and limitations of technology in immersive settings and there are currently three areas of experimentation:

- **Invisible Magic:** There are possibilities for technology to be used to create theatrical magic. Used in a similar way to haze and lighting, as technology develops there are increasingly more opportunities for Punchdrunk to pursue different ways in which objects can appear to hold supernatural properties or for characters to appear and disappear.
- **Communication with a character:** Using technology that is familiar to the audience, such as a mobile phone or tablet, live messaging can be used to communicate with characters to reveal instructions where the audience have a mission to complete. In *Kabeiroi* and *Silverpoint*, Punchdrunk used mobile phones for characters to be able to direct instructions directly to audience members.
- **Portals to other worlds:** Punchdrunk have used technology to draw the audience into a parallel world that has no limitations of a building or fixed space. In *The Oracles*, a cross platform storytelling project developed for KS2 primary school pupils, children were invited to visit Fallow Cross through an invitation in a game that they were playing on tablets in school. Where the installation allowed the children to step through their screen into a multidimensional world, the digital game offered possibilities of exploring the expanse of a landscape beyond the physical limitations of a building.

When using technology Punchdrunk follow some useful principals to ensure that the it still feels authentic to the world being created. Does the technology add a new and exciting element to the experience? Is the technology supporting the story we are trying to tell? Does the technology still fit within the immersive world?

Kabeiroi was an adventure for one pair of audience members in which a seemingly ordinary sightseeing tour in central London quickly became a mission for the audience to unlock the next stages of the story. Punchdrunk used audio and smartphone technology to blur the worlds between the fantastical and the everyday. *The Oracles* provided an opportunity for Punchdrunk to develop a project that could test new technology where sensors hidden in objects could cue theatrical effects, and an interactive installation was mirrored within a digital game.

Other works using technology include: *Believe Your Eyes* (2016), *Silverpoint* (2015), *Goldwell* (2011)



Photo: Stephen Dobbie

Further Reading

Punchdrunk and Machon, Josephine. (2018) *The Punchdrunk Encyclopedia*. London: Routledge.

Alston, Adam. (2016) *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Biggin, Rose. (2017) *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Freshwater; Helen (2009) *Theatre and Audience*. Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Higgin: Peter (2017) *A Punchdrunk Approach to Making Theatre*. British Library Catalogue: www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/a-punchdrunk-approach-to-making-theatre

Machon, Josephine. (2013) *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Machon, Josephine. (2009) *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pearson, Mike. (2011) *Site-Specific Performance*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Punchdrunk and Abrams, Julian. (2015) *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*. London: Punchdrunk Theatrical Experiences Ltd.

Tims, Charlie. (2016) *Doorways: A Review of Punchdrunk Enrichment Projects 2013-2016*. London: Punchdrunk Enrichment. Available on the Punchdrunk Website.

Links to Punchdrunk project films

The Lost Lending Library: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tmehxk37fgs>

Against Captain's Orders: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YymSj_-PB3g

Small Wonders: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFDpxSegTOs>

The Oracles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWGPUCulGd4>

Beneath the Streets: Lost and Found: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9ogHqUelqg>

The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZKNNMombV8>

Kabeiroi: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mf7M5a6lxvU>

Exercises

These exercises may help to offer a way into devising your own projects. Some of the exercises you can complete on your own and others might require pair work, or the support of a larger group.

1. Designing Emotional Journeys

In order to explore Punchdrunk's design techniques that are centered around the audience, we want you to use your imagination and delve deep into the world of memory. You need to be extremely precise in the way you picture things in your head. For this you are going to itemise as many characteristics of this world as you can. You will then use these as basis for developing both the emotional journey of your world and look at how a space can evoke these emotions. This is a way in which Punchdrunk designers explore the breadth of emotions that can be contained in a world's emotional journey and examined as a whole.

THE EXERCISE

The teacher or workshop leader should narrate the following to the group who should focus and follow these instructions. Time can be taken to gather responses as you work through the following, sharing individual findings.

Walk around the space. Look at where you are now, and take it in. Can you describe it? Is it sterile, neutral, studio, cavernous, not exceptional, functional, communal? Really look at it, is there anything that stands out as off beat: a crack in the wall, a stain, anything? Look from the real bottom of the floor, behind you, do a real scan. Have a good look around, understand the 360 of this space.

Take some time for everyone to share their discoveries. Share something you have never spotted before.

This next part can be done lying down and the use of music can be experimented with too.

Now close your eyes. The room is now a classroom from your primary school. Imagine yourself in that classroom. Think who's to the right of you, how about your left. Take stock of room. Was there a memorable lesson here? Or maybe a memorable friendship? Ground this space in your memory. How are the desks? Are they worn? Are they new?

Now walk your way out of that classroom, retracing your steps in the corridors. Are they very long? Can you see the end of them? Are they narrow? Are they winding? How about the ceilings, how high are they? How is the lighting? Can you remember the lighting source? Are there any windows in these corridors? Can you think of the colour? Are there patches of wear and tear? Can you see stains? Are they noisy? Do they echo?

What other rooms are you passing by on your way out?

Do you know what is behind all the doors? Do you pass the headteacher's office? Can you glimpse out into the playground, or the streets around?

You have now arrived at the front door, how does this door feel? Is it heavy? Can you note the colour? Perhaps it isn't a door, but a gate? Is the reception far? Could you sneak in or out unseen?

Turn around and attempt to fly over and visualise the whole of the school. Look at the architecture. Think of the overall layout and parameters of the grounds. Where is the furthest point? What is the boundary that delineates the school? Is there a good place to hide? Who might find you?

Now open your eyes. Hold onto this long journey. We want you to use all you've pictured in your head.

Thinking about the journey you've just travelled choose a question below:

- Think of the most exciting space in the school. When and where do you feel trepidation and exhilaration?
- Where do you feel safe in the school? Where do you go to when you need to take a break from it all?
- Can you think of a private space in the school grounds? Is there anywhere you can call your own?

Next use the below categories to think about all the qualities of your chosen space including all the textures:

Floors: colour, noise, wear...

Walls: colour, wear, design, doors, weight, warmth, age, stains...

Ceilings: height, materials, colours, echo, light quality...

Now share your discoveries with everyone else. You can see how much detail you have been able to generate in such a short space of time with just your imagination. This analytical process is key to the process of designing for Punchdrunk. You have started to consider all the elements for making a touch real design that is rich and evocative and also ordered all this information in a way in which you can now make sense of it.

2. World Building

This exercise allows you to begin to build the world of a play text beyond what we see on stage when it's presented in a traditional form. This approach has been useful in thinking about early stage creation of mask show work. Its use is not limited to this and the exercise is a good way to visualise and think about the world in which your play is set and can be a springboard for socio-historic contextual research.

THE EXERCISE

- Take your set text. Or any text you know well.
- Make a list of all the characters named.
- Make a list of all the places and spaces in the story.
- Now begin to imagine your world further.
- Make a list of all the characters we never hear about but might be connected to named characters. e.g. Macbeth: generals, servants, brothers, sisters, barber, tailor.
- Think about magical characters both good and bad
- Make a list of the spaces we don't directly hear about in the story. e.g. The Cherry Orchard- The other rooms in the house, the surrounding gardens and estate, the local village (individual shops), servant quarters and houses, railway station. Think about spaces which are dangerous and on the outer limits, forest, wasteland, scary pub or nightclub etc
- Think about which spaces characters go to and inhabit:
Which are their home spaces?
Which spaces do they pass through?
Which spaces do they find safe?
Which spaces do they fear?

On a large sheet of paper map out where all the places are and who inhabits that space and how they use it. Find pictures online, in books or magazines that are indicative of how you imagine these spaces.

Now begin to think about how you might translate this world into your school site and buildings. Can you translate your world into your school site or can you think of a better space that you know well? Begin by taking the most important space in the play, think about its characteristics, size of space, how it feels, which spaces geographically lead into and out of this space. Identify a space in your school where you could place this space and begin to build your world around this.

Falloon Cross

THE MAYOR'S
HOUSE

POTTING
SHED

WHALE
FAE
S

GILM
IN

THE MAYOR'S
HOUSE

HERMINE'S
CAFE

HERMINE'S
CAFE

3. Playing With Light

For this exercise you'll need a candle (or LED candle), space where you can achieve full darkness, a space with traditional lighting such as a ceiling light.



Photo: Julian Abrams

THE EXERCISE

Try playing with the following as ideas and qualities as you compose the light in any space.

Darkness - Magic

Twilight - the space between, the liminal, the uncanny, either or and neither nor

Sculpture - haze - warmth - cold

Filament - looking into the source, the element, the wick, the burning embers

Crescendo

Always question; how will the audience respond to this?

Think about a candle as a durational and storytelling device, as much as how it influences an atmosphere - hold onto the feel of the flicker of the flame, the crackle of magic, the ghost stories it tells.

Take a scene, from any play.

With the working light source on - most likely a ceiling fluorescent-tube light - ensuring the space is functional and sterile, read the scene aloud, as a group, sat around a table.

Then...

Take the same scene to a space where you can get it as close to blackout as possible.

Individually, find a shelter under a table, a chair, in a corner, a space that is as enclosed as possible.

Lighting only a single candle, an organic light source to emphasise the ephemerality of the light - it may burn out at any point - from wherever you are positioned, look into the light source.

Now whisper the same scene....

4.

A Way Into Sound Design

This is simple and straightforward exercise which helps to ignite the imagination and instill a cinematic vision through the body. This exercise can be reworked according to a project's needs in order to initiate a response to the materials to be explored, so the musical choice may well fit the concept and source. Different musical choices, of course, lead to alternative imaginative responses. Interludes are good for this. Anything with lyrics is likely to be too prescriptive, unless it gives an underlying impression of mood, era or otherworldliness.

THE EXERCISE

Lie down.

Switch the lights out.

Play your chosen music as loud as possible.

Open yourself up to feeling that piece of music. Let it wash over you and, only then, following your instinctive response, allow yourself to visualise the music internally.

Let your mind's eye travel across an imaginary landscape. Feel the journey become cinematic. This may be abstract or representational, or a combination of the two.

Let the music become the soundtrack to this imagined film. You are protagonist or camera or both.

Allow the music to help you navigate the imagined terrain, to set the atmosphere, to create pictures, to tell a narrative, to colour emotion, to find its crescendo.

Allow the exercise to reach its natural conclusion as the musical score ends.

This exercise can serve as a springboard for discussion and practice and, as such, can be reworked and applied in form through any given discipline, such as writing, costume, lighting design or installation. The music would be taken and played loudly through your found space, combining the imagined terrain, atmosphere and narrative with a physical location and its architectural or landscaped features. Use the exercise to think beyond the exercise into the world to be created.



Photo: Julian Abrams

5. Listening To The Space

This is an exercise for uncovering the emotional footprint of a building or space by responding to it instinctively. This exercise can be explored in any space that is new to you. Of course only enter buildings where you have permission to be there.

THE EXERCISE

Discover a building or space for the first time but letting yourself be led by the architecture of the space. Your goal is to locate the safest room within the building, and then also the most threatening. Allow yourself to be pulled along the transitions of the space and, at every step, let your instinct lead you:

Where does my gut want me to go? Where on the barometer of safety am I? At this crossroads am I seduced by the stairs to the floor above, pulled into a room in front of me, or rushed down the corridor to my left to escape the ominous, dark void?

This exercise can only be done once; on yours, and the group's first explorations of a building.



6.

Crafting A Journey

Punchdrunk has many exercises and ways to develop a common language within the performing company.

These exercises are the core for building the company style and bring everyone together with the same practice. This exercise can be adapted and expanded to suit the project you are working on or the ensemble of people you are working with.

THE EXERCISE

This exercise is for 2+ people and make sure everyone can pair up with someone else.

Find a partner. One person is the leader and one person is the follower. Start by standing opposite each other. The follower now closes their eyes. The leader takes the follower by both hands and leads them on a journey. Without speaking the leader must guide the follower around the space. After a few minutes stop, open your eyes and discuss your experience. Do the same exercise again, changing the journey but now with only one hand in contact. The leader can change the intensity in which they are holding the followers hand and leading them on the journey. Experiment with holding the follower close to you, or with a very light hand contact, or quickly with a sense of urgency, or just by the little finger. Repeat the exercise again with different body parts in contact. How does the leader take the follower on a journey when you are only touching elbows, or back to back, or the leader is holding the follower by the shoulders?

Now you can swap round and try these variations again.

This exercise helps to build trust between performers and requires a sensitivity to listen to your partner's movement and the way in which their body moves. You can start to build a good relationship with your partner and is a useful starting step to working together on contact duets, where you devise movement sequences in relationship to each other.