



# FRANTIC ASSEMBLY

THE CURIOUS  
INCIDENT OF THE  
DOG IN THE NIGHT  
TIME

RESOURCE PACK

## Who are Frantic Assembly?

From a reckless leap into the unknown 25 years ago, Frantic Assembly has developed into one of the UK's most successful and best loved Theatre companies.

Our ambition is that we continue to learn and remain committed to making brave and bold theatre. At times it is physically dynamic and brutal. At others it's proudly tender and fragile. But Frantic Assembly has always been about more than just the work on stage.

It is about the ethos of collaboration, of empowerment, of that constant desire to improve. It is about telling stories in a voice we don't always hear and about finding talent in places we don't always look.

Our distinct creative approach has influenced contemporary theatre-making and foregrounded the use of movement directors and choreographers in new dramatic works. It has inspired writers to embrace new creative processes and opened up actors and dancers to new techniques. This is a matter of great pride as we continue to do something different and to do it differently.





### What is the Frantic Method?

The Frantic Method is approaching devising as a series of tasks, each broken down into building blocks. This is designed to establish progress from the simplest discoveries.

Performers are encouraged to take a moment back to its simplest truth and build from there. This places dancers, actors, students, teachers and all participants on the same starting point. Using these building blocks they are empowered to find and create complex work through a process that is safe, fun and constantly illuminating.

This process came about through recognising my own limitations coupled with a desire to teach and share something as soon as I learnt it. I wanted to develop a language that felt accessible and honest. I wanted to share a process that would take people past their perceived limitations.

Over the years this has helped performers understand how their bodies tell stories and how those bodies are capable of a strength and nuance they might not have recognised before.

The Frantic Method has helped Frantic Assembly become leaders in movement direction within theatre. It is essentially direction through movement and promotes an acute physical awareness that can be implemented in moments of stillness just as it can be in the physically spectacular.

The Frantic Method is at the heart of all of our work on stage and in studios across the world, from *Fatherland*, *Things I Know To Be True*, *Othello*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* to our work with students of all ages and abilities.



- Scott Graham, Artistic Director of Frantic Assembly



## Christopher in Space

We always felt it was important that an audience did not just hear about how Christopher thought he could make a good astronaut. It was always our ambition to take the audience deep into that imagination, to a place where Christopher is free of the anxieties of the everyday and can demonstrate exactly how he would achieve those aims.

On one level his assertion that he would make a good astronaut could seem merely naïve but it was important that we saw this moment and understood his confidence and how it felt for him to be liberated from his anxieties. You get a sense of that weightless freedom, of the simple joy of flying through space with your best mate (Toby the rat!). You also feel how crushing the next scene is when he is told to drop his investigations into the death of Wellington.

We call this scene of Christopher flying in space Astro Boy and it is always one of the hardest to achieve in rehearsals! It is so important that we take things back to the basics every time. Our rehearsal rooms need to flourish on a sense of achievement and not a series of failures. By making progress through a series of building blocks we can surprise ourselves by what we are capable of and build confidence, strength and communication along the way.

Below are a series of building blocks that I might use to take a company towards achieving this scene.





## Building Block 1 - Push Hands

The first building block is always communication through touch. I use an exercise developed from something used in Kung Fu, Tai Chi and probably many martial arts. There it is sometimes referred to as sticky hands. I have stolen it, changed it and call it push hands.

Put people in pairs facing each other and get one to put their right hand on the top of the others right hand. The person with their hand on top is in control

and can lead the other around the room, high and low. This only works if the person below maintains the pressure that exists between the two hands. Neither person can grip the other. They must navigate the room maintaining this same pressure. If successful, they are communicating through touch. They are sending and receiving signals through this contact and this is the building block of all the physical work that will follow.

They are both trying to get better at this communication. Test them to see if they can get faster without losing the quality of touch (and communication). If this is really working then get the person following to close their eyes! They are now only receiving information through touch! Now it is also a trust exercise.

Some people might find this scary but most find it easier and become more proficient at following their partner's physical instruction. This is because they are properly keying into those instructions and are denied unwanted stimuli (what they see happening around them). It becomes clear that the instructions can be complex and the responses immediate.

Push hands is pretty much my 'go to', Day 1 exercise for any rehearsal as it what it explores is fundamental to communication and trust. It is also quick, good fun and easy to do!



## Building Block 2 - Rocks and Ledges

It is always difficult to write about lifting, please bear with me!

Set a group of 6+ people in a horse shoe configuration. These will be the lifters. One extra person will be lifted. That person should stand facing the open 'horse shoe.'

At this stage I will introduce the concepts of rocks and ledges. 'Rocks' do very little other than allow themselves to be clambered upon. 'Ledges' create opportunities for the climber to press down and lift themselves. This language and concept is an important inversion of what might be expected from the 'lifters' and the 'lifted!' Here it is the person lifted that is being reminded to be active and not passive. They have to push their weight down through the rocks and use the ledges.

The 'lifted' walks forward towards the deepest part of the horse shoe. The person standing at this place is the 'rock.' The lifted leans forward and places their hands on the rock's shoulders. The rock merely maintains their balance and straight back. As the lifted leans forward they may naturally lift a leg. Encourage them to exaggerate this slightly. The 'ledge' places their hands under this leg (ideally the leg comes up to near waist height) and the others place their hands on the lifted.





Encourage the lifted to press down into the shoulders and the ledge, bringing their other leg up as they do so. The rest of the team guide the lifted to a position where they are held above the group and are pressing their weight down through straight arms and into the rock.



Once secure you bring them down by swinging their legs down towards the rock. That way they are always landing on their feet!

Repeat this and try to get some fluidity into it. The lifted is not jumping but pushing down into the group. The group are sharing the weight and guiding the lifted into position using the push hands communication explored in Building Block 1.

The group might find this becomes very easy and even very light. You could take away people who are not taking much weight and find that you could hold that person in the air using only two very surprised lifters!

Many people will feel insecure about their ability to lift and comfort in being lifted. It takes time and sometimes lots of encouragement but the results can be startling and exhilarating when a group finds that they are capable of so much more than they thought!



## Building Block 3 - Time to Perform

Once confident at this you can then ask the lifted to run and jump into this position. With a few positional adjustments the group can take this momentum and effectively fly the lifted around the room.



I am probably jumping a few stages here as it does take a few weeks, lots of sweat and maybe even a few tears to complete Astro Boy to the required standard in the rehearsal room. The point of this important building block is what you do once you have got the moves mastered. You tell the story!

It is important that the lifted person looks free and weightless. They do this by giving their weight through the earlier building blocks. Now is the time to tell the audience what you see and how you feel about this ability to fly. Once you do this you will be guiding your audience to engage with the story and the narrative context and not the physical effort involved in making that person fly.

When it really, really works it looks like the lifters are actually trying to stop the lifted from flying off through the theatre rather than hoisting them above their heads. Something to aim for, maybe!





# CHRISTOPHER THE COLLABORATOR

## Christopher The Collaborator

Just like in Mark Haddon's novel, everything within the show is seen from Christopher's perspective. Before we started work on the show we had heard talk about how this would make the show impossible, or at least extremely difficult to make. I think our joint instinct to embrace this perspective actually made things so much easier for us.



We could always ask what would Christopher think about this? Would he be uncomfortable? What would he focus on in this situation? That would make colours, noises and situations ping out to us. His perspective meant that we would not present realistic representations of Swindon or Paddington train station but would try to capture the levels of anxiety that each one inflicts upon him. This gave us the freedom to be much more imaginative and, ultimately be much braver.

It was always fun to see how the central character informed and collaborated with the creative departments. Christopher's love of maths and computers completely guided Adrian Sutton's inspired soundtrack, it being made with prime numbers, electricity frequencies and 8-bit gaming sounds. Bunny Christie created a huge set that looked like it was sheets of graph paper. All of this meant that precision was paramount. Christopher would insist on people being in the exact position. The graph paper would tell us if anyone was less than on point!



# CHRISTOPHER THE COLLABORATOR

## 9-box Squares

Christopher's perspective meant that we would look at situations Christopher found himself in through his eyes. In this moment of stress, what would his coping strategy be and what would the world look like to him? An example of this is the scene we called Luggage.

Christopher is hiding from a policeman and has taken refuge in the luggage rack of the train. Various people come to get their bags and either converse with him, abuse him or are terrified by him.

Instead of actual luggage we used the boxes that had made up various aspects of the set before. We decided to treat this like a puzzle where Christopher has to stay on fewer and fewer boxes as people take their luggage away.

We set out 9 boxes in a square and got our Christopher to lie across them. We then invited people to come up and take a box away or move a box. Christopher had to respond by moving but not falling off the boxes. This game was a lot of fun and really tested the Christopher actor! It was like trying to stay on top of a game of reverse Jenga!

But this was not intended to diminish the anxiety. Once we had set the desired choreography we could remind the performer that the stakes and anxiety for Christopher were still very real but the process of making it referred to the world of computer games and puzzles that Christopher inhabited.

This approach also informed the creation of Astro Boy, allowing him to fly around on a jet pack and bounce across the moon. It also guided the creation of our scene at Paddington Station.





# CHRISTOPHER THE COLLABORATOR

## Paddington Pin Ball

Christopher arrives into a new level of cacophony and chaos as he pulls into London for the first time. He does not know the rules or where to go. It was clear to us that this Paddington Station needs to look very different from the Paddington Station we might know.

Our ambition for this scene was that it might start small and then become an overwhelming nightmare. We wanted to make it in two sections, one which might be rooted in naturalism and one which reflected the nightmare.

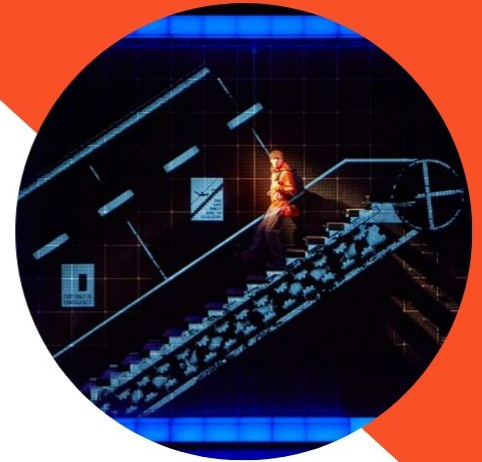
To tackle the first section, we explored all the interactions he might have with people as he bumps into strangers, tries to walk against the flow of the crowd, tries to find information whilst struggling with the overload of information, etc. This was a very useful exercise for the performer playing Christopher and a good reminder to everyone else how alien, oppressive or stressful this world would seem to this young boy. Having mapped this journey out we then looked at the second section.

To do this we just looked at the route of the first section and asked how each interaction might look if it was made bigger, more dynamic, more explosive. This meant that bumps became huge crashes where Christopher would fly into people and be expelled from them and into another confrontation. If he recoiled from a potential bump, that move could become a somersault or an explosion. Importantly it still meant that each moment was still being created referencing how it feels for Christopher but with this time with much greater anxiety. The effect of this made Christopher bounce off people and walls at breakneck speed. Our name for this scene was, aptly, Pinball.



# CHRISTOPHER THE COLLABORATOR

The effect created meant that the scene moves from what might look like an objective viewpoint to the undeniably subjective viewpoint of a terrified Christopher. As ever this was of vital importance and again illustrated why this golden rule was never a burden, an unhelpful limitation. It was always a guide and actually felt like a collaboration with the character himself. After all, Simon Stephen's adaptation makes it very clear we are all performing Christopher's version of the events.



I would encourage you to explore each moment from Christopher's eyes. Ask what he sees, what he likes, what he recoils from. What are his coping mechanisms? Where would he rather be? This really helps the other characters understand how close they can get to him. Moments become interesting when you identify the tension that exists between a character that wants to embrace someone but knows they cannot. How do they resolve this? How do they find a compromise? (Remember the hand touch between Christopher and Ed. Remember what happens when Judy rushes towards him for an embrace).

There are many obstacles in Christopher's life and many he looks at like a game he must conquer. What might this game look like? Find the game. Find the sound of it. Find what it must look like from his eyes. But then find the real anxiety and terror. For example, if the floor is lava, it really IS lava. This was our approach to the creation of this show. Take it as a starting point and have a play!

To find out more about our work, please visit [www.franticassembly.co.uk](http://www.franticassembly.co.uk)

