



Let's stand up and act!

Astrid Biret

**Let's stand up  
and act!**



**Let's act together  
and everywhere!**

**Astrid Biret**

*Research work in design under the supervision  
of Élisabeth Charvet, Sophie Clément  
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*High Diploma in Applied Art specialising  
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in graphic design.*

*Raymond Loewy School of Design,  
La Souterraine*

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**Vous**  
a lively and animated citizen,  
who will begin to intentionally  
(or not) **to** read this research work.

**ONE.**- What is theatre ? I don't really know,  
but, what I know for sure is that it's not  
my cup of tea!

**THE OTHER.**- When we go to the theatre,  
we expect a meeting.

**ONE.**- I don't read theatre and  
I'm not interested in reading it !

**THE OTHER.**- Reading theatre  
makes you feel alive.

**ONE.**- If I read out loud, I feel ridiculous.

**THE OTHER.**- The theatre shows the life  
of humans. And also that humans are alive.

**ONE.**- I may try someday...  
but not now!

*When I was eight years old, my parents enrolled me in a drama class that took place on Wednesday afternoons in the village's performance space. That first experience were followed by multiple theatrical practices that led me to a Bachelor's Degree 1 in Performing Arts. However, it was the shortest, but also the most intense experience that impressed me most. My meeting in 2012 with Alessandro Arici, the founder of La Pastière Company transformed me. In only twenty-four hours, we put on a show with students from four different schools. There were shy, dreamy, anxious, ambitious and also sensitive people. At the end of the adventure, we had all grown up and become more tolerant and self-assured. And it was not just the practice of theatre that had transformed us: it was the collective experience!*

# Preface

# Opening scene

Reading theatre is playing a dialogue, it's a group of people giving life to a text. Yet, we are living more and more shut in our houses or flats, while humans need social interaction to survive. An English piece of research conducted between 2004 and 2012 by Andrew Steptoe, professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at the University College of London, and his colleagues shows that the death risk beyond the age of fifty-two is twenty-six percent higher with people who have very little human contact. Therefore, it seems important to find activities that include social contact in order to tighten collective links. The eco-designer may have a role to play in regaining social cohesion. And, what if reading theatre could be a new form of engagement against what, in today's society, makes us individualistic? Knowing that drama texts encourage dialogues and orality, **how can the graphic designer, through the theatre texts, stimulate our ability to move, read and act together?** First of all, we will see that the theatre is a specially literary genre that does not interest the majority of people. Following this, we will explore the fact that reading theatre text is a form of reading that allows people to get out of themselves in order to better understand the world and the others. Finally, we will focus on the role of the graphic designer as a mediator between the reader and the theatre text.





## **ACT I-The theatre, a specially literary genre that does not interest a majority of people.**

*Before starting, the reader should be comfortably seated in a chair. He will have to cross his legs and hold the abstract with both hands. The reader may be equipped with glasses if necessary. He will read the first act silently. The room, in which the reading takes place, should be welcoming and, bookshelves, full of theoretical books on the theatre, will serve as a backdrop scenery. The light will be soft.*



## 4. Konzert G-Dur



The sign as a distancing device. Image from *The Six Brandenburg Concertos*, choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, 2019. © Carol Pardo and Mezzo live.

### Scene I - What makes the theatre text special compared to other genres?

Theatre is a special literary genre: a play is different from a novel, an essay or a comic book. Indeed, the drama text is a text designed to be spoken, it is the genre of dialogue. It encourages exchanges between the characters but also between the characters and the spectator: it is the principle of double enunciation. And an exchange can be conveyed

**Theatre is a genre that encourages reading aloud and acting.**

through gestures and words. Theatre is therefore a genre that encourages reading aloud and acting. In order to facilitate this level of reading, the presence of the stage directions can describe the actor's postures, gestures and actions. This form of writing is specific to the theatre and serves as instructions for the reader-actor. Stage directions enable the reader to construct the characters he is going to play and allow him to visualize the scene. •

Reading theatre also develops people's imagination. As a general rule, books trigger a creative force in a reader. He has to imagine the appearance of the characters, the general atmosphere or the location where the story takes place. Unlike in a novel, the characters are not meant to stay entirely in the fictional world. The author invented them in order to see them come to life through the voice and body of a real person. Therefore, a theatrical text offers significant creative freedom. In the Elizabethan period in England, the imagination had a very important place. In fact, for the theatre decor, boards were displayed reading for example the words: "the forest" or "the house". The audience, but also the reader, needed to have a strong imagination to complete the text. Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker in her choreography *The Six Brandenburg Concertos* also uses a similar device to awaken the spectator's

imagination. Between each of the choreographic performances associated with a concerto, a man, dressed in a casual tracksuit, walks slowly with a sign in his hand. He stops in the middle of the stage and

shows it to the audience. We can read the tone of the concerto—“Konzert G-dur”—for example - that will be played a few seconds later. When the word written on the sign is brutal, abrupt, direct and without narration, viewers have to look for inspiration in themselves in order to imagine what they are going to see. The board is a real eye-opener, which detaches us from reality and makes us aware that what we are watching is exceptional. In the same way, if the theatre reader is able to project himself mentally into an interpretation of the play, he will have the status of a creator. He will become an actor, a stage director, a stage designer, and so on. •

To sum up, reading theatre is a singular practice that does not invoke the same specificities as any other literary genre. The dramatic text encourages exchanges and dialogues, it is a text of orality that involves the reader's body and imagination. Nevertheless, this literary genre is not very popular and we will understand why. ☹

## Scene II - Why don't we read theatre ?

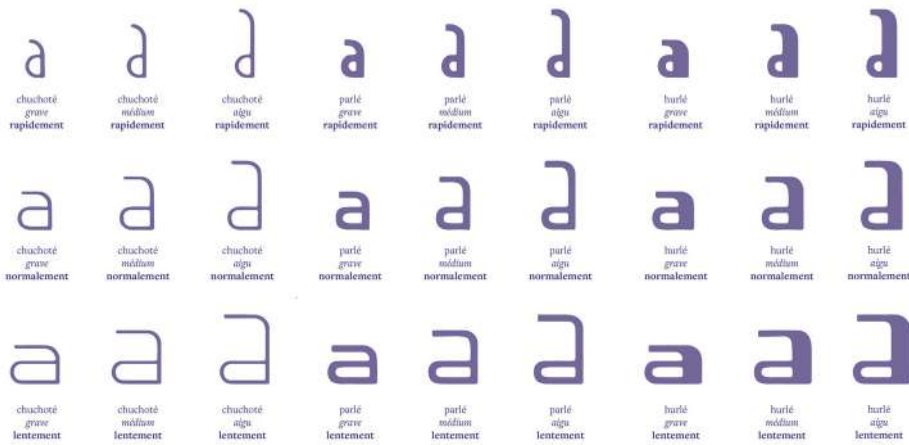
“Have you read theatre recently? Do you read any regularly? If the answer is yes, you are an exception!” Usually it is stage directors, actors and theatre fans who read this literary genre. The lay people only approach the theatre in a classroom, sitting on a chair. Reading theatre is perceived as essentially academic and the editorial layout goes in the same direction. In fact, there are two classifications in theatre editions. On the one hand, there are school textbooks where footnotes, case studies and staging photographs follow the text. Everything is set up to support the reader in a good understanding.

1. Remarks of Claire David, the editorial director of Actes Sud, interviewed in 2019 by Astrid Biret in a survey of more than 120 booksellers and publishers.



School edition: the large amount of information at the expense of imagination.  
*Le chandelier*, Alfred de Musset, Nouveaux Classiques Larousse, 1972. © Larousse.

Nevertheless, does not such a profusion of annexes, documents and annotations have an aesthetic and disturbing effect on the reader? Moreover, do not these numerous analyses of the text exclusively refer to school time? A time that the reader does not necessarily want to return to and, above all, a time when the relationship between knowledge and feeling may not have encouraged the reader to experience a lively reading. In addition, these explanations and illustrations do not allow the reader's personal imagination to develop. He is forced to see a specific interpretation of the staging, proposed by someone else. On the other hand, there are editions where the typographical treatment is quite similar to other literary genres. Certainly, there are line breaks for each change of character and the name of the person speaking is given at the beginning of the prompt. But as a general rule, the lettering itself is worked on to be read, but not to be said and played. Publishers generally choose serif typefaces for the only purpose of having a text that is readable and pleasant to read. However, by focusing exclusively on reading comfort, they omit the oral dimension of the drama text. •



The *Kouije*, a typographic character to read and hear, designed by Pierre di Sciullo, 2004  
© Pierre di Sciullo.

Yet the work of the letter can invite the reader to get out of silent reading and try reading aloud. Indeed, the typographical treatment can induce a way of speaking. For example, the *Kouije*<sup>2</sup> created by the graphic designer Pierre di Sciullo is a font that aims to embody the voice. With this typography, the thin letters are whispered and the bold ones are shouted. The longer the letters are stretched—in length—the higher the pitch is. And the wider the letters are, the slower the rhythm is. By intervening directly on the shape of the letter, Pierre di Sciullo establishes a visual code that could serve as a stage direction. Nevertheless, this typography remains at the state of experiment and its appropriation seems quite complex in reality. Without focusing on the pronunciation of a text, the graphic designer could set himself the goal of designing a layout that may allow the development of the imagination without trapping the reader in a single interpretation. •

In a few words, if the uninitiated reader is not given any clues or instructions, it is very likely that he will not make the effort to read theatre. There are many reasons for not reading drama texts, but it would seem that this lack of practice is due rather to fears and preconceived ideas about theatre in general. Lay people do not feel familiar with this literary form and therefore resent it. Actually, drama texts are aimed at either school children or theatre professionals and amateurs. Citizens seem more inclined to go to the theatre than to approach it in its written form. However, reading deserves as much attention as performing. ☺

**The typographical treatment can induce a way of speaking.**

2. The *Kouije*, a typography created in 2004 for the exhibition *Écrire à voix haute* at the Ferme du Buisson contemporary art center. This experience was completed but not broadcast.

### **Voice Without Borders**

*During my internship in Malta, I did an experiment on reading theatre aloud. I asked the people I met to read two pages of Skinned, a play written by Abi Morgan. The readers were entirely free to choose the place, the position and intonation. Reading in public spaces have sometimes led to incongruous or funny situations. Here are their testimonies...*



**Alice.-** It's a bit complicated to imagine the scene.

**Janice.-** We read theatre for school but not for fun.

**Jasmina.-** We have to make people understand that reading theatre is a great thing !

# Intermission





**Yanireth.**- You have to imagine that you are every character.

BON SOIR.

BONSOIR.

BONSOIR.

BON SOIR.

BONSOIR

BONSOIR.

BONS

BONSOIR.

BONJOUR.

*From writing to voice*

*Typographic work can induce a way of speaking. The colour, the weight, the size, the serif, the tool used to write, the pressure or the background are parameters that can change the way we read. To validate what I am saying, I vocally recorded a group of people reading these "bonsoir".*



**ACT II- A form of reading  
that allows people to get out  
of themselves in order  
to better understand the world  
and the others.**

*Another person will have to join the reader. This person may sit on the armrest of the chair. Both must read aloud act two. They will take turns reading and they will have to take up the conclusions of each part together, in one voice. The light should be brighter than for act one.*



VERY SLOW FOR THOSE  
WHO WAIT VERY FAST FOR THOSE  
WHO ARE SCARED VERY LONG FOR  
THOSE WHO LAMENT VERY SHORT  
FOR THOSE WHO CELEBRATE



Quote from Shakespeare, facade of the Justkids house, Daku, Los Angeles, 2019. © Justkids.

## Scene I - A lively practice that fosters cultural diversity.

Within a century our habits and entertainment have completely changed. The time spent watching television or mobile phones has replaced the time spent in the community. On the contrary, theatre cultivates a cultural multiplicity because it is a lively practice in which each performance is unique. Each performance is singular because it depends as much on the actors' performances as on the reactions of the audience or the context in which the experience takes place. •

In theatre, the physical presence is at the heart of the creation. If one decides to involve a live performance in the creation, the result will always be different and singular. Natural elements cannot be totally anticipated, choosing to work with them is fighting against conformity. And the graphic designer can also include a live performance in order to add diversity to his work. For example, during the *Life is Beautiful* festival organized in 2019 in Los Angeles, the street artist Daku exhibited his work on the facade of the JustKids house, partner of the event. Daku installed a fragment of William Shakespeare's text by fixing tin letters horizontally. The message can be read thanks to the shadow of the sun rays. By resorting to natural elements, Daku brings the typography to life, while getting the bodies of passers-by to move, as they are invited to find the right posture to read the sentence. The performance changes every second and remains completely dependent on an animated process that makes this work lively. •

**In theatre, the physical presence is at the heart of the creation**

To sum up, people go to the theatre to see other people's bodies come alive. When you do something that involves your own body but also the body of an other person, you're made to get out of yourself and live with those around you. The work of an sustainable

designer must necessarily take into account such diversity. It is a question of getting citizens to read theatre with the ideal goal of empowering everyone to interpret the world. ☺

## Scene II - Reading and acting lets people embody another person and therefore develop empathy.

Theatre is about coming together in a place and reacting together. By definition, it is a collective practice which, in order to exist, needs several factors, namely one or several actors and an audience. It is a collective work in which the author, the stage director, the actors and the audience have a role and a place. Going to the theatre is a social act that imposes the live performance as the common denominator between the participants. It is also the result of a desire to experience something together in a place and share a moment with others, instead of staying alone in front of the television for example. •

Moreover, reading theatre means also opening oneself to otherness and offering the other a place in oneself. When a citizen reads or acts, he is led to embody different characters: theatre involves a discovery of oneself and of the other. Drama texts are discovered, shaped, diffused and received in groups. Gathering in the same place allows us to better understand each other, to empathize and to put words on our own emotions. Going out of oneself by embodying a character is to engage a reflection on the others and to understand them better. This phenomenon is the basis of any diverse and tolerant society. Reading theatre is meaningful because it is a practice, as we saw above, that includes the human. Theatre allows us to position ourselves, to react, to move, to see something else and to better understand the world and its inhabitants. •



In the Elizabethan theatre, the spectators were very close to the actors and therefore very involved in the play. Image from the film *Shakespeare in Love* by John Madde. © DR.

On the whole, it seems conceivable for the graphic designer to make us aware of the importance of being animated and to spend time reading and playing together. Furthermore, today I have the impression that empathy is more necessary than anything else. We live in an individualistic society but paradoxically we are more and more led to mix. Indeed, we currently live in a society that includes people of different ethnicities, genders, ages or sexual preferences, people with different cultures and ideas. It, therefore, seems necessary and essential to put ourselves in the place of the others in order to accept each other and not to be judgemental. ☺



## **ACT III- The graphic designer, a go-between between the reader and the theatre text.**

*For the last act, both readers will have to stand up and go outside to the nearest public space. Both will read aloud, engaging their bodies. They will play the text and may invite others to join them. The energy should rise in crescendo as the reading progresses. The light will be natural.*



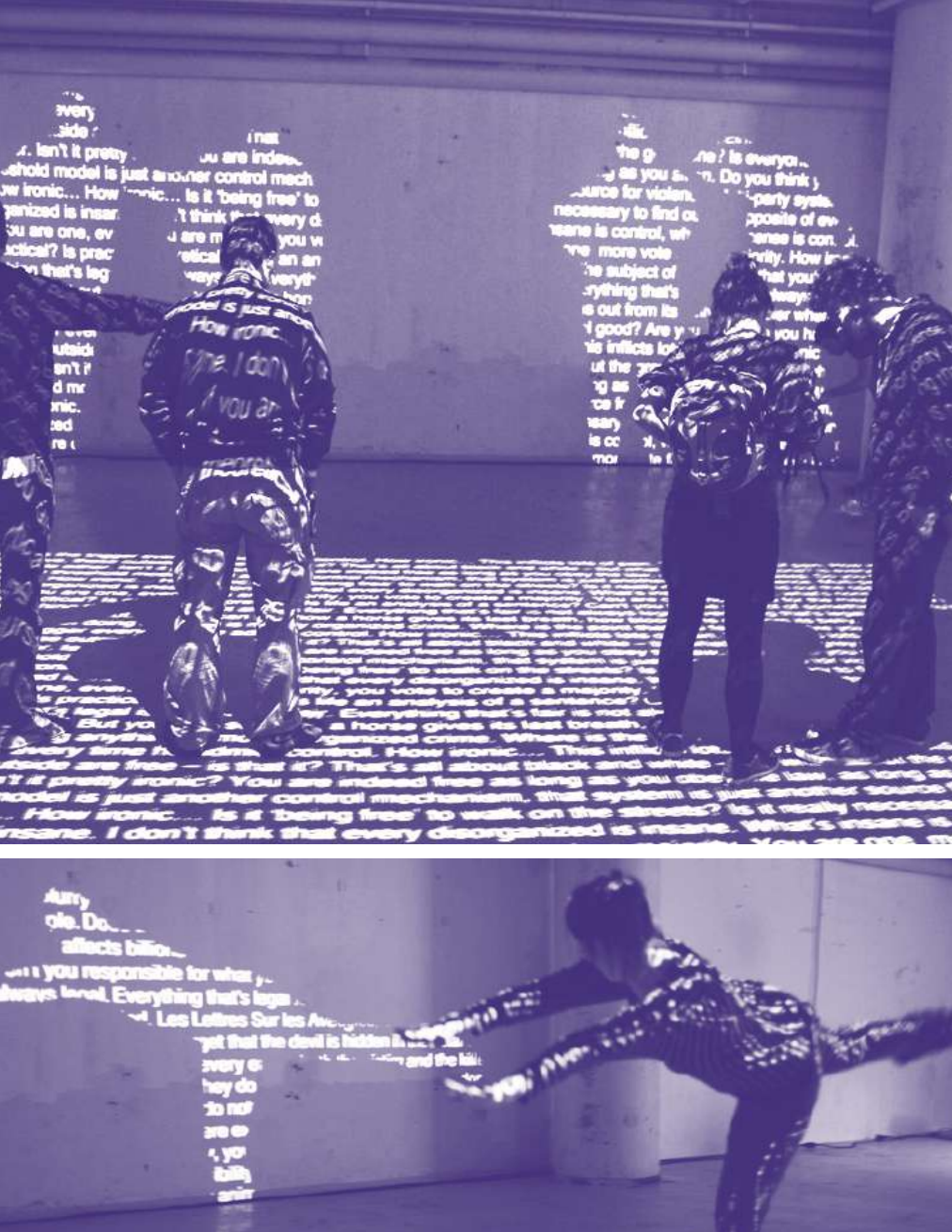


**The whole difficulty of making people read theatre is to offer the citizen the possibility of imagining.**

### **Scene I - A open production to offer the reader the possibility to develop his imagination.**

The whole difficulty of making people read theatre is to offer the citizen the possibility of imagining his or her own version of the scene, without imposing a predetermined picture of what could happen on stage. Therefore, it seems necessary for the graphic designer to

create shapes that give the feeling that there is something left to do. For example, Paula Scher, an American graphic designer has worked on the facades of the school affiliated with the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. To create a new identity for the place, she only used typography. In fact, she opted for words in capitals and chose a lineal to create reading rhythms that indicate the disciplines taught in the school. The lettering is circled, which means the typography is highlighted on its outlines. Some yellow words contain a black outline that gives the feeling that you can see neon letters. However, there is no use of electricity. The letter plays neon, it puts itself in the place of something it will never be. There is in the choice of the form, the will to mirror what characterizes the theatre, that is to say, the incarnation of another. In the same vein, by choosing only typography, Paula Scher underlines that emotions can also be conveyed through words and not necessarily images. By writing down only the terms that characterize the school, such as "theater", "dance" or "music", the graphic designer verbally piques the imagination of the passer-by. Nothing tells us what kind of dance or theatre is practiced in these buildings. By offering an open form, Paula Scher questions passers-by. It is an invitation to enter into the building, but also, to a mental journey. The sustainable graphic designer is expected to open up the field of possibilities to potential interpretations. •



Interactive device that directly involves the body of the audience, *In order to control*, Nota Bene Visual, 2012. © Nota Bene Visual.

In a few words, a sustainable designer has a responsibility, his work will result in guiding the public. To do this, it is important to leave space for daydreaming. By allowing passers-by to interpret a message, we invite them to enter a dynamic form of reading. ☉

## **Scene II - Include the reader into a dynamic movement.**

After making readers aware of the power of their imagination, the designer's objective will be to get the reader to move and act. Indeed, to engage the body is to mobilize the mind. Researchers at the University of Santa Clara in California have conducted a scientific study<sup>3</sup>, which concluded that walking helps people think better and develop their creativity. Keeping still in a chair does not stimulate reflection. The usual posture for a reader is to be sitting or even lying. However, as we saw in the first part, theatre is very different from other genres: it gets words to come out of silence into the world of orality and therefore involves the voice, the body and the surrounding space. •

The device *In order to control*<sup>4</sup> set up by Nota Bene Visual requires a complete involvement of the body so as to keep focused on thought. The studio has worked on ethical, social and moral issues, showing the danger of not reacting to political, social and ecological problems. For this purpose, their digital device is interactive and results from a ground projection of the text. As the text scrolls by, the audience has the possibility to walk on it. To create a complete sentence, the visitor must move, bend forward, extend his arms or associate his body with other people. There is a close connection between the text and the body: without the audience's gestures, the text cannot appear and

3. Published in the Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition, published online in April 2014.

4. *In Order to Control* is a performance realized in 2012 by the multi-disciplinary studio Nota Bene Visual based in Istanbul.



therefore the performance could not exist. The text is embodied in the gestures and movements of several citizens. The technical process and the subject unite to evoke how important it is for citizens to “move” and act in the face of societal problems. •

To conclude, in order to conduct an active reading, it is necessary to engage body and mind. The graphic designer must set up forms which reverse our reading habits. However, in order to bring people together, the graphic designer must choose the environment in which he or she wants to intervene. ☺

### **Scene III - Occupy spaces that are not the domestic spaces to reach as many people as possible.**

How can the reader be made aware of all the virtues of reading theatre if he is not used to reading it? In order to consider this practice, it may be necessary to organize a meeting. Everyone should have the opportunity to read theatre, regardless of their age or social class. With the aim of reaching as many people as possible, it seems relevant for the graphic designer to opt for a space that is the opposite of the domestic sphere such as a train station, a café, a school yard, a shopping centre or a street... Jenny Holzer, an American artist, also opts for the diffusion of art for everybody. To do so, she propagates provocative and subversive messages in order to trigger an awakening of critical consciousness. She wants to address everyone and uses a simple and understandable language. “I used language because I wanted to offer content that people—not necessarily art people—could understand”. The artist has reflected on universalism in terms of the dissemination of a message. In fact, she uses the international language—English—and projects her sentences on a large scale, in capital letters, in the public space, in order to communicate her messages to the greatest number of people. Jenny Holzer gives priority to places frequently



Jenny Holzer's messages projected in the heart of New York, on the Rockefeller Center shopping complex. The sentence is taken from the response to “The Family Sells the Family Gun” by Jennifer Mascia, 2019. © Jenny Holze and Filip Wola.

used by inhabitants and tourists. She does not want to limit herself to galleries and museums that are reserved only for a specific public. The context of dissemination is a militant's choice because it means deciding who is targeted. •

By occupying spaces different from the domestic sphere, the theatre text will be able to emancipate itself from the book in order to meet the citizen. Today, social rites tend to disappear whereas they used to allow people to meet and share time together. For example, less than a century ago, a lot of moments that marked the farming calendar were celebrated. Villagers would gather and dance throughout the night. Why not reinstate such moments of sharing between individuals? The graphic designer could create the opportunity for passers-by to get together and play together for a few cues or more. ☺

**O**f course, reading will not solve all the flaws of today's society, but reading theatre texts is one of the means that can empower people. Although theatre is still very little read, it is a genre that may defeat passivity. Reading theatre makes us aware of our power to act and think. It also means supporting diversity by giving a central place to human beings. Finally, reading aloud and acting may counter apathy. Doing it together and embodying the different characters allows people to better understand the other's emotion as well as their own. However, in order to enjoy all the benefits of theatre reading, it is important to move away from a passive, silent and individual reading, typical of other literary genres. The graphic designer has a role to play in making the reader aware of the full potential of the virtuality of theatre.

To do this, the graphic designer will rely on graphic principles that highlight the human aspect. He could propose an open form that invites the viewer to complete it. The passer-by will also have a role to play in the reading of the message. In fact, he should not remain passive in front of the images. Thereafter, the designer has to get the reader to take part in a dynamic of movement by directly involving his body and mind. The form must be designed to encourage action and catch the eye. Finally, the graphic designer will have to think about the space in which his message will be diffused in order to take into account as many people as possible. By choosing to work in public spaces, the sustainable designer invites all social classes to participate. To make graphic design that includes every citizens is to make people aware of their ability to reason collectively. There is not only one possible solution to restore the desire to move and share common moments. The work of the sustainable designer is like acupuncture: he must intervene by small touches and propose an alternative in his field, to gradually make ideas and people move forward!

# Outcome



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Extrait disponible sur :

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/watch?v=koExYifqFRo>

(Consulté le 24/01/2020).

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## Let's stand up and act!

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*When was the last time you read a play? Have you noticed that theatre is a particular literary genre? It's an oral text, it's dialogue, it's an art of action. Just by its form, the theatre text invites people to read aloud and make gestures. The stage directions, specific to drama texts, describe the postures, gestures, actions and intonation of the actors. In order to come to life, the theatre text must be embodied by the reader. And if the lay reader is not guided at all, it is very likely that he will read theatre like any other literary genre—sitting and in silence—or not read theatre at all. Besides, isn't it the graphic designer's role to provide visual accompaniment? Based on this observation, how can the graphic designer, through this work on the theatrical text, stimulate our ability to move, read and act together?*