
SPACE IN FAIRY TALES

My desire is to show people who are interested in working with children the concept of *scenography* and its importance in creating a children's theatre performance or creative space, where children can move (children's exhibitions, reading room in libraries, children's rooms ...). I would like to "offer guidance" on how to create an interactive space for a child, but also a parent, teacher, librarian, etc., into the world of a particular fairy tale. To create better understanding, personification and understanding of the symbolic level of the story. To teach children readers to read symbols and materialize the spatial plane of the story metaphorically. To remind them that the material is very important and carries an important meaning. To teach them to think like a child. To understand the perception of a child at various age and to adapt the space, in which they find themselves. Beauty is beauty, it is important not to complicate it. I would like adults to understand that a child does not need much. Our kitchen table can become a boat or a dumpster with a discarded toy ... We can all create a small theatre or room full of stories at home and we just need creativity and, I think, also a few boxes.

Puppet Theatre is the perfect tool for developing children's imagination and creative thinking. It is versatile; we can make it from virtually anything, anytime, anywhere. We do not need a theatre hall and professional actors. I think there is enough room in our homes, plenty of material and the whole family is composed of actors.

*To enable a child to communicate with his or her surroundings, not just in words, but also through his / her space, material, movement, sounds, etc, it is necessary to develop **thinking through metaphor**.* The child's horizons and creativity will spread. *Puppet scenography is an important means of communication in the puppet theatre, communicating through metaphor and stylization.* Moreover, we can create this metaphors world with our child in our homes.



We will show it specifically on one example. I took one book, one story. It is called *Dierozrút (Hole-eater)*, by Slávka Liptáková and Fero Lipták.

It is a story about The Hole-eater who was eating holes. And since he had already eaten all of them at home, he chose to search the world for more to feed. As he travels the world, he finds that it is not so easy. There are only half-

holes in the forest, and the city is so crowded, every single hole was fully utilized. Even those who have hollow heads have something in them. Even people without a heart have some piece of it somewhere, however ugly or small. Therefore, the Hole-eater goes up to space, where he can finally be filled with a black hole. As he stuffs himself with it, the idea sparks in his head, that it is not that easy to be a Hole-eater. The more holes he eats, the emptier and hungrier he gets. He feels the nothingness of his being and he was already saying goodbye to life when he suddenly fell back home. There he drank from the water in the well and got the craving for "sour dough and ground poppy and the plums as dark as the bottom of the well." (one of traditional Slovak foods)

The story is serious, full of symbols and philosophical thoughts. *If we want to tell this tale to a child in such a way, so they can understand it, it is important to simplify!* This is essential in stage design and puppet theatre. And so, we will simplify the story to this kind of content, as I have given you a moment ago. This makes it easier to split the story to **basic themes**. From those basic themes, we choose **one theme**, which we elaborate **metaphorically in space**. Nothing complicated. **We choose the material that we have at home ... or that tells us metaphorically something about the story** (that is the next level). And with this material, we can work to create a simplified theme for this story in space with the child. **Through Metaphor!** It is like a little girl playing with her doll and creating her apartment, a wardrobe, a shop she goes to, a job ... just her space. Little girl can navigate the doll in it, she has a fictional story. And yet the material used for the game is often diverse!

Let's go back to the Hole-eater. Let me introduce you to a very simple example of how we can play puppeteers with a child. I pulled the theme from the story: "What did actually Hole-eater eat, was he able to feed on it at all and what was left at the end?"

We need one shoebox, a piece of cardboard, scissors, a marker (we can even have more colours, e.g. three basic ones).



We all know hand puppets - and their typical mouths made from our hands. In this way, we can create the Hole-eater; with the other hand, we can animate his feet. This is the Hole-eater.

Where does the Hole-eater live? We will make him a house. From this box.

But what else do we need? The Hole-eater must have something **to eat**. What? **Holes!** We will make holes for him. We will draw them (they can be in different shapes - geometric, different colours as the child imagines holes in 2D). All done. So let's see if the Hole-eater likes it. But he can't eat them because they are just drawn holes.

We have to cut them out! Done, is it better? **We are still communicating with the child through the Hole-eater puppet!** But what was left of his house? Almost nothing and he is still very hungry!



He needs to find new holes. So he goes on to the world. From the cut-out parts, we make him a walkway and the Hole-eater walks over it.

He is entering the town; we need to make **a small town**. We take the lid of the box, a few cut parts from the little house, and draw holes on it, that we can find in the city. For example channels, gutters, subways...

But why is the Hole-eater going to the city? What is he looking for? Holes, and can he eat all of them? No, we have to cut the holes out again. The Hole-eater is feeling fuller, but there is nothing else to eat in the town.

Therefore, he goes into space, because he heard about **black holes** that could be a paradise for him. *Cut a large hole from the lid*. And indeed, the black hole is so huge that **it eats all the other small holes**. That is, all the holes (*animated black hole*), that we created for the Hole-eater. There is nothing left. But the Hole-eater was still hungry and had nothing.

What can we give him, so he is not hungry anymore? **Can we try to give him chocolate milk and banana bread?** We can build a new house for him (if we have another box), but without holes, right? Does he need holes when he already has milk and bread?

This was a very simple example of how we can revive the materials around us. And this is the basic principle with which puppet theatre / puppet design works. Just take the story, pull a theme out of it, choose the right material and transform it into a metaphorical world! **Do not illustrate!** *A child knows and understands if a fork should be in a given play a tree, for the child it is a tree, not a fork.* Don't worry, the child will understand it completely.

Reading a book as a process of experiencing its story.

For a while, I have been looking at how to use scenic techniques and principles to support the reading process. I don't know if you ever realized how puppet theatre is incredibly versatile (and communicative). We can make it practically anytime and from anything. The basic metric of scenography is a metaphor. A metaphorically materialized story. The theme pulled out from the story, the chosen material, space and metaphor, equals the scenic space. Simple abbreviation and so much communication. The theatre creates. Develops in several ways. However, you need to learn to read. To do this, the child must be led.



Let's go back to the Hole-eater.

Based on this thought simplification, I have created a diminished story of the Hole-eater in space. A child is able to identify with a figure using a puppet. A child can “personally” experience the story that takes place in the book. In his or her own way. They use free movement, "puppet" animation and imagination. All this is confronted with reality, and thus the child adapts the story to the environment and material.

This is how I have given you some guidance on how to create a spatial story. It is important to teach the child to identify with the hero. Create your own simplified form of a story that can only be based on a single idea. With what we have, both material and space. It is a game and the child learns basic needs / forms for life in the game.

This was one example. The second example is the "exhibition" we can see in these spaces.

Here we can see a story line that is not part of the book. Thus, we teach children to develop other possible and impossible ideas.



I create the playing space of the book Hole-eater. Laboratory, where it is possible to test and examine. "Playing" with props changes the views of the Hole-eater by changing perspective. Focus on detail. Getting a child to different levels of the viewer, whether the child is an observer who sees a spatially created house where they can see every detail, or the child is a direct part of a story, where they can change things, try, touch, move, help the Hole-eater



with choice ... directly participate in creating a new story. It stimulates the creative creation of a world that is not written in the story. Children learn to create and implement their own concepts. This exhibition is not an illustration of the story. On the contrary, it is based on a few ideas that are in the book, but that are not in the story. There is no mention of what the Hole-eater's house looks like. Where did his wife go, how looked her journey to "know" the

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tastes? I choose a detail and make it whole. What is essential in stage design, creating a new world ... I stimulate it in children.

The space is designed to engage the viewer as much as possible. His vision, touch, movement ... Two lines are mirrored in this space. It is the line of the Hole-eater and his wife, as each goes out on their own way.



The Hole-eater tries to take shortcuts; he is interested only in holes and everything that is related to holes. His wife sets out on her journey through the well to explore the new world. A world without holes, or with holes that are needed. Her journey is more challenging, there are ladders, obstacles ... and the viewer is forced to "identify" with her. To help her, viewers must be active, crouched down, sit on the ground, make her path. They become an active part of the story. While with the Hole-eater, they remain observers.

At the end of this space, the Hole-eater can see his house again. It is mirrored. Yet there is something different, the house is divided in halves, one is

orange and the other is still black. At the orange half, the holes are fixed, at the black one holes are still present. Which half will be whose?