

## “The Rhetorics of Space”: Introduction

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**Abstract** The group of articles here assembled and entitled “The Rhetorics of Space” describes a specific re-appropriation of the concept Steven Mullaney so dubbed. The phenomenon, in the present context, refers to the trans-national discourse of nationalism(s) and its “cultural inscriptions” in space. Variations of the rhetoric of space characterize some nation-states’ capitals, namely those that received the formal-political status of a capital in the course of well-known emancipation movements in Europe—from the 19th century forward. The particular variants of the rhetoric of space explored within the pages of the essays to follow, however diverse in approach or focus, are all bound by one common thread: the intense cultural-political function of each national literature and its correlations with literary history.

**Keywords** Steven Mullaney · Rhetoric of space · Nationalist ideology · Transnationalism · Capital · National literature · Cultural syndrome

The set of articles entitled “The Rhetorics of Space” refers to some aspects of the subject discussed at the international conference “The Rhetorics of Space” (Ljubljana, November 24–25, 2011), organized by the Slovenian Comparative Literature Association. The basic concept of this conference focused especially on the relations that associate the space of the national states’ capitals with (national) literatures and literary histories. Thus, it followed the present literary studies’ orientations implied in the so-called spatial turn. (Some aspects of these orientations are presented by Urška Perenič’s article that follows). However, it also strengthened the trace of the historical turn by borrowing Steven Mullaney’s concept of the

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rhetoric of space<sup>1</sup> developed in his essay *Toward a rhetoric of space in Elizabethan London* in 1997. According to Mullaney, rituals performed by its urban society translate urban “topography” into culturally meaningful “topology”: “Any city could be described, regardless of its time and place, as a projection of cultural values and beliefs, as a casting of ideals and ideologies into concrete form, an inscription of cultural practices and concerns in the very landscape of community.” (Mullaney 1997, p. 10) Thus, the town appears as a text:

[I]ts common places were actual sites, visited and frequented by the citizens of London, and at the same time they served as commonplaces in the rhetorical sense of the word: as topoi or loci communes, sites of potential meaning, open and available to various figures and uses, even capable—as rhetorical topoi often are—of antithetical or ambivalent significance. (Mullaney 1997, p. 16)

The aim of our borrowing this concept was its accommodation in another of space-historical conditions. In respect of the relationship between topography and ideology, Mullaney already suggests that this relationship, when it is formed in a pre-modern town by traditional society, differs from it when it is formed by modern society in a modern town (see Mullaney 1997, p. 7). However, in respect of reading some more precise variations of the rhetoric of space, this difference between modern and traditional society seems too general and suggests the need to take into account some more precise differentiations of modern history and its different conditions, which motivate the cultural mapping of space. The rise of European national emancipation movements in the course of the nineteenth century, for example, crucially characterized those cultural communities that considered themselves as national communities without their own (national) states; and these situations certainly represent a historical specification that—at least in some aspects—forms some special conditions and effects of the cultural mapping of the (desired and imagined, and not yet officially politically confirmed) national capitals. In other words, moving the focus to a number of the national capitals that geo-politically mapped the Central-, Northeast- and Southeast European spaces demands an accommodation of Mullaney’s concept of the rhetoric of space by taking into account those representations of power that are generated by the nationalist ideology which, moreover, tends to achieve a hegemonic position in the imagined central space of one national community. Mullaney’s description of the representations of power as cultural inscriptions in the urban space (like rituals and monuments) can perfectly serve for its accommodation. However, the “content” of these representational forms is somewhat different. It seems that some more special aspects of the rhetoric of space “spoken” by one national capital can be perceived. The first aspect includes the teleological variant of temporality that is at work in the imagined national communities. The second one takes into account the potentially permanent, durable, stable visual signs inscribed in the cultural space.

A short excursus will show the general characteristics of the space-historical conditions drawn above. J.G. Herder’s famous essay *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791) articulated the crucial arguments for

<sup>1</sup> This concept was developed in the context of this variant of the New Historicism that was later renamed the “Poetics of Culture” (S. Greenblatt).

integrating one people in one individual historical national community (see Herder 1813, p. 211). Based on the retrospectively recognized common history and culture, one national community as an “imagined [political] community” (Anderson 2006, p. 6) reflects itself in its “spiritual” tradition, pointing out its cultural production in which a privileged position is possessed by the national language and its art, i.e. (the national) literature. These arguments, soon associated with the romantic apology of freedom (also including the freedom of a community that imagines itself as a nation) formed “the matrix: nation—people—language—culture—history—territory—state” (Juvan 2012, p. 327). Summarizing M. A. Perkins’ *Nation and Word* (1999), Juvan (2012, pp. 327–328) concludes:

In the European bourgeois world of the 19th century, nationalism [...] acted the role of a secular religion, recognizable in its commonly broadened, universal language that appropriated and re-shaped its imagery, concepts [...], and ethos mostly from the Judaeo-Christian heritage based on the sanctity of *logos*, the word.

However, the Judaeo-Christian heritage<sup>2</sup> is not of crucial meaning just for the privileged status of (the national) language (in the case of many modern national communities even in the literal sense of the creative “word”). It is of crucial meaning also for formatting—in these conditions the pre-dominant—variant of the linear concept of time, namely the teleological concept of history that motivates more special aspects of the rhetoric of space of the “capitals” without their own states.

In the European course of the nineteenth century, many communities also recognized themselves as nations without “their” national states and therefore subordinated to the “strange” state power in multi-national states like the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, etc. In Juvan’s summarizing of J. Leerssen’s *National thought in Europe: a cultural history* (2006) it seems that these nations without national states which argued their right to achieve national (political) autonomy developed the so-called “separatist nationalism” (Leerssen 2006, p. 136). In comparison with the “state nation”, this kind of nation will “ground itself mostly in the individuality of the native language, in the collective memory of the historical experience, and above all in different kinds of cultural production—from the arts to sciences.” Thus, the trans-national discourse of nationalism(s) formed “common matrixes, topics, aims and strategies in different spaces” (Juvan 2012, p. 328). However, nations without states formed a special variant of the nationalist ideology, designated as “cultural nationalism”.<sup>3</sup> This one decisively characterizes the central space of one national community, i.e. the imagined, potential national capital.

<sup>2</sup> The role of the nationalist ideology as a “secular religion” allows the cultural role of the most important historical personalities who were selected as the crucial formative forces in the national tradition to be designated “the cultural saints”. (However, this designation is mostly used for descriptions of the cultural role of the so-called national poets, for example, in the project *Cultural Saints of European Nation States* (CSENS). This aspect is important also for Dović’s and Hajdu’s articles that follow).

<sup>3</sup> “The relation between cultural and political nationalism is complex but fundamental. In some measure, poetry and learning provided a reservoir of propaganda and rhetoric for politicians.” (Leerssen 2006, p. 185).

At this point we can return to Mullaney's rhetoric of space. It refers to the town in the sense of (the Renaissance) capital which represents relatively unified political power. On the contrary, moving the focus to the town in the sense of a merely desired, imagined, potential, and not yet officially politically confirmed national capital necessarily leads to taking into account the more ambiguous rhetoric of space. Namely, the cultural mapping of the central urban space is produced by a (national) community that has not yet achieved more reliable, permanent, and stable political power generating this cultural space. Against it, another power—the "strange" state-political power—is at work, principally represented in the *actual* political capital (such as the Habsburg Monarchy's Vienna in the geopolitical territory of Central Europe) of the multi-national state. However, the cultural-political representations of power characterized for this *actual* political capital are painted out to the peripheral central urban spaces (of the desired, potential capitals). This asymmetrical relation generates and represents the rival cultural inscriptions in the peripheral, politically non-official "capital" of one subordinated nation, trying to neutralize or drown its own cultural inscriptions. (See also Dović's, Hajdu's and Talivee's articles that follow.) It seems that in the course of the European national emancipation movements, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the production of cultural inscriptions in the space of the (imagined, desired, or, in the Austro-Hungarian case of Budapest, officially confirmed) capital generated by the nationalist ideology vigorously intensified, led by two intentions.

The first one forms the *extrinsic* evidence of the national cultural presence in history (also serving as an argument for national political emancipation). However, its individual specifics paradoxically imply a more difficult access to their meaning for "the others" that do not belong to the (national) community. The second intention forms the *intrinsic* evidence by which the community constructs, strengthens and maintains its (imagined) identity.<sup>4</sup> Both kinds of this evidence (synchronized in unique signs) can be inscribed in the urban space. In both these cases the evidence refers to the relation between the ("other") newcomer and the native, mentioned already by Mullaney (1997, p. 6) in respect of their different understanding of the cultural space: "it was precisely the play of interpretive difficulty [...] that distinguished citizen from noncitizen. In order to define a community or coherent group, symbolic devices had to be difficult to interpret." (Mullaney 1997, p. 14) This formulation can be translated into a designation of the relation between the local person belonging to the local national community and "the other", who comes from another national community or simply from somewhere "outside".<sup>5</sup> (This aspect in a wider sense—as a question of the observer

<sup>4</sup> Precisely in the sense of C. Geertz's cultural-anthropologist interpretation of a cockfight observed in Bali, i.e., a story that the Balinese community itself tells about itself: in this sense, culture appears as "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate their knowledge about and attitudes toward life". (Geertz 1973, p. 89) In Mullaney's words, cultural "rituals acted first as a means of embodying cultural values in the urban topography, and second, as a vehicle or rehearsing or performing those values." (Mullaney 1997, p. 14)

<sup>5</sup> "'The device', as D.J. Gordon reminds us, 'does not exist by itself; it has to be read; moreover, it has to be difficult to read. To read, it is a kind of play, and its function is to define a group that *can* play—to establish the group's sense of coherence, identity, and security.'" (Mullaney 1997, pp. 13–14) On the other

who investigates the townspace—appears in the reading of one literary representation of the Estonian capital Tallinn developed in E.-M. Talivee’s article that follows. It appears also in Katja Mihurko Poniž’s article, this time in respect of the feminine reading of a city.) In respect of this, in its extrinsic-evidential dimension also paradoxical cultural code, rituals such as performative spectacles and stable (permanent) visual signs such as statues and monuments can motivate aesthetic pleasure in “the other’s” (incomer’s) perceptions,<sup>6</sup> that is, in the best case. However, as stable visual signs they mostly enable just the pragmatic geographical orientation in the territory in the sense of indications on the map.

However, it seems that this synchronized extrinsic and intrinsic evidence formed in cultural inscriptions in the space of the (desired, potential, imagined) national capital strengthens and intensifies its rival “content” directed against the actual, predominant, but “strange” state-political power. This acceleration of the cultural inscriptions which transpose the space of the peripheral, potential political capital almost to the “handbook” on one national cultural history is motivated by one more special aspect of the rhetoric of space, namely the teleological variant of the modern, historical concept of time.

The historical temporality seems to be a more important factor in these national emancipation conditions than it was in representations of power presented in the late medieval or Renaissance town as described by Mullaney. Mullaney points out that traces of spectacular ceremony (performed, for example, as a representation of the historical event of a coronation) can be, *by the very occasion*, potentially permanently inscribed in the townspace: “Rather, such concerns were set in context, transcribed into a language of monuments and common places. When ceremony ceased, the city remained: a trace, a record, a living memory of the cultural performances it both witnessed and served to embody” (Mullaney 1997, p. 13). However, it seems that these inscriptions tend just to keep up the power that is already present and stressed in its (imagined) “timelessness”. On the contrary, the cultural inscriptions in the space that is still just the potential (imagined) official-political central space, i.e. the (desired) state capital of a national community, intensify almost *programmatically*, representing the power that has not yet achieved its official confirmation as the state-political power; and for this reason it is at work in the teleologically considered (historical) temporality: directed to essential change, in our case to the politically achieved national emancipation when time will be able relatively to “stop”, representing the final phase of nation-building, interpreted as a lasting one and yet in this respect reminding one of the imagined “timelessness” described above. In this desired final phase, the power generated by the nationalist ideology can be actually and “totally” presented.

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Footnote 5 continued

hand, a post-modern presenting and subversively deconstructing this “kind of play” can establish the post-modern sense of the uncertain identity developed by the marginal groups that “invade the centre” by “using signs from the periphery”. This is suggested by Tomaž Toporišič’s article that follows.

<sup>6</sup> Similar code *can* characterize those literary texts that “explore” culturally encoded spatial relations as symbols of the social relations. This way of reading is presented by Alena Čatovič’s article that follows.

The paradoxical representation of this—mostly teleologically<sup>7</sup> present—power can be recognized in an accumulation of this kind of visual spatial signs that in principle have a *long-lasting* “nature”, i.e. visual signs that are considered as stable and durable cultural inscriptions—i.e. the “sacralised” text—in the potential state-national capital: they include statues, monuments and different visual features, as well as the institutional buildings that very concretely represent power either in the sense of the politics (of foreign and domestic affairs) and the economy, like buildings of the national bank (and, in the Hungarian case, for example, also the parliament building) or in the sense of cultural politics, like the buildings of the national theatre, national philharmonic, national opera house, and national library.

Of course, these stable (and provisionally permanent) visual signs are not very special features of the central urban space, teleologically imagined as the future national capital; they also appear in the spaces of communities characterized by the ideological variation of the so-called “centralist nationalism” (Leerssen 2006, p. 135), as in France. However, in the case of the space culturally formed during the process of national emancipation, the number of these stable—and usually permanent—visual signs intensively increases and at the same time they acquire additional (extra) meaning (in the sense of R. Barthes’ cultural sign) as *announcements* of the ideal (imagined) teleological “accomplishment” of one national community. Their intention, when they appear, is also the announcement of the *lasting presence* of the national-ideologically generated power identified with the national community in “its” space.

This partially specific kind of the rhetoric of space represented in those historical spaces that are generated by cultural nationalism(s) is based on the so-called “cultural syndrome”: the term was used by the Slovene sociologist D. Rupel to designate the Slovene cultural-historical “specifics”. This “specifics” (as Herder’s heritage and its accommodation in German and other nationally engaged Romanticisms) assigns a special privilege to the (national) language, as well as to its “highest” expression, namely (the national) literature. This national-state-constructive function of literature for the nation without a national state—in the Slovene case—is first recognized by literary criticism and literary history, in the most precise way in 1969 by D. Pirjevec.<sup>8</sup> His opinion is developed by D. Rupel who (in Marxist terminology) describes the role of Slovene literature in the period of the national emancipation movement as follows: literature “tries to substitute all of the functions that in the developed societies are carried out by the other (or mostly by the other) sectors of the social superstructure (juridical-political, educational, scientific ... sectors)” (Rupel 1976, p. 424). For this reason, especially the discourse performed by nationally engaged politicians and intellectuals ascribed extreme political, or more precisely, cultural-political power to the (imagined)

<sup>7</sup> This possible relation between the national emancipation movements and the teleological conception of (historical) time together with its origins in the Judaeo-Christian concept of time is, in respect of many European national emancipation movements, perfectly represented in the poet A. Mickiewicz’s description of the Polish nation as “Christ” among the nations. (This designation appears in his *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* in 1832). (See Mickiewicz 1832, p. 23)

<sup>8</sup> Pirjevec designated the “poetry” of the (Slovene) nation without a national state as “the ‘aim’ of our national existence and its principal confirmation” (Pirjevec 1978, p. 57).

national literature. (See Juvan 2012, p. 316 and Dović 2011, p. 27) As soon as it is—at least relatively—officially possible, the national literature is intensively culturally inscribed in the (imagined state-political) capital of the national community in forms of stable visual signs such as statues, monuments, other kinds of visual features, buildings of (the national) institutions, as well as with linguistic (symbolic) signs like the names of streets and squares that appropriate the (sur)names of poets and writers. (See also Hajdu’s and Dović’s articles that follow.) Of course, the urban space is also performatively culturally appropriated by the rituals performed in honour of the national (literary) “cultural saints”. This cultural-political meaning of the national literature that importantly co-operates in the rhetoric of (the capital’s) space is, of course, supported by the national literary history. Both of them can be seen as one of the special factors that can explain the speciality of the rhetoric of space in the conditions formed through the process of nation-building.

Thus, the rhetoric of space can serve as another argument for the opinion that the so-called “cultural syndrome” is not just a Slovene speciality. This opinion was first suggested by M. Juvan.<sup>9</sup> M. Dović further developed it in 2011: his essay shows “that the diagnosis of a ‘syndrome’ as something specifically Slovenian is false since it proclaims as an anomaly conditions and processes that were typical for the (emerging) small national cultures in Europe.” (Dović 2011, p. 29) In comparative literature studies the “presence” of the “cultural syndrome” among the “cultural nations” (in Leerssen’s sense) can be proved by the results of researches gathered in the SPIN platform (Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms) and in Cornis-Pope’s and Neubauer’s (eds.) *History of the literary cultures of East-Central Europe: junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries* (2004) where (the national) capitals, i.e. their rhetoric of space can be included in the concept of the so-called “topographical nodes”.<sup>10</sup> Reading the rhetorics of space of those capitals that were formed as (national) capitals during the teleological process of the national cultural and political emancipation is certainly more precise when it is based on the trans-national orientation of comparative literature studies. Thus, Mullaney’s concept of the rhetoric of space enables different applications and accommodations for reading the spaces that “speak” in/from different space-historical conditions. (For example, the conference in Ljubljana unfortunately could not discuss the rhetorics of space in the precise aspects of the post-colonial theory). However, by reflecting the role of the hegemonic national ideology(-ies), these applications and accommodations of the concept of the rhetoric of space can serve as one of the reflective foundations of the trans-nationally oriented comparative literary studies that tend to exceed some

<sup>9</sup> See Juvan (2001). In Juvan’s opinion (2012, pp. 318–320), the cultural syndrome can be recognized in the so-called “small” literatures (that are probably meant as those literatures that intensively co-operated in the political formation of national states during the process of national emancipations), as well as in imperial states like Russia. However, the cultural- and political-historical specific conditions of the imperial states can also differ greatly from each other and some of them, like the Russian conditions, seem to be more similar to the conditions of “small” literatures in respect of the cultural role of the national language and literature.

<sup>10</sup> “[T]opographical nodes—the cultural areas or locations that become the centrifugal disseminators of their imaginary and, at the same time, function as centripetal centers of attraction, drawing writers, poets, publishers, and artists into their orbit of interaction”. (Valdés 2004, p. xiv)



of the exclusive dimensions of the national literary histories. This tension is supported by the spatial turn in literary studies too.

In one of the articles that follow, *An overview of literary mapping projects on cities: literary spaces, literary maps and sociological (re)conceptualisations of space*, Urška Perenič presents “the state of literary mapping projects on capitals or large cities”. Referring to the results already gathered in the research project “Space in Slovene literary culture: literary history and GIS-based spatial analysis” and in comparable projects in the world, the author points out two possibilities of researching real and imaginary spaces in relation to literature: the first, in cooperation with (mostly) geography, is based on the use of maps; the second, supported by modern sociology, considers space in its relation to literature as “a result of the given material features and of the social dynamics and practices of the users of that space”. The articles that follow represent (in a wider or narrower sense) different aspects of these possibilities.

After a short introduction to terminology based on poly-systemic research principles, Marijan Dovič in the article *‘Every monument erected by a nation to its great people is erected to the nation itself’: Vodnik, Prešeren, and the nationalization of the Carniolan capital’s topography* describes the spatial aspect of “the canonization of two key figures of Slovenian poetry from the early nineteenth century, Valentin Vodnik and France Prešeren,” namely the installation of their statues in the public space of Ljubljana, which at the end of the 19th century was still the (peripheral) capital of the Habsburg province of Carniola. Dovič argues in detail “how the actual battle for the semiotic nationalization of the city was fought through the occupation of public space for statues of “great men of literature.”

The semiotic nationalization of the city space (the capital) in relation to (national) literature (too) can be seen in the textual and material evidence of ideologies which have been at work in the formation of Budapest as a modern capital since the last decades of the nineteenth century. Péter Hajdu in the article *The memory of the national literature in the Budapest city centre* focuses on public monuments and (renewed) street names. As one of the most important aspects of the repository that serves the construction of the national identity, national (political) history as formed by the figures of “kings, generals and politicians” can be recognized. A detailed description of their significance in national history, especially when the statues refer to nineteenth-century events, suggests ways of emplotment(s) of history. “Literature, however, appears in this context as a political issue too.” Among others, as the most significant example the author points out the statue of the nineteenth-century poet M. Vörösmarty. „ The poet is represented as sitting in an armchair as a giant figure above, and a set of minor figures [...] represent the whole of society [...] listening to his poetry”. A short description of the destiny of different statues and monuments in contemporary urban planning, i.e. contradictions in imaging their significance, reveals changes in the collective memory.

In her article *Literary Tallinn at the end of the nineteenth century: the structure of its townscape. An overview*, Elle-Mari Talivee reads literary representations of the capital Tallinn from the semiotic and post-colonial points of view. Selected Estonian novels by E. Vilde, E. Bornhöhe and A. H. Tammsaare reveal a culturally and socially



controversial townscape. The article analyzes these controversies by referring to Tallinn’s cultural history: it describes the three parts of the city in respect of its cultural colonization and concludes that “[b]oth the natural landscape of the town and the social stratification offer the possibility of seeing Tallinn as a hierarchic structure, a pyramid”. The article, taking into account the appearance of the Young Estonian movement in 1905, finds traces of recognizing cultural colonialism in the novels analysed: “[t]his can be seen in the forms of city writing beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, in a didactic form: mapping, interpreting and concluding.” The analysis points out the significance of the observer, embodied in a literary hero whose spatial position can serve as a means for reading the city.

The question of the observer, or more precisely, the feminine point of view, is stressed in Katja Mihurko Poniž’s article *Gendering the capital: Zofka Kveder’s rhetorical construction of women’s position in the urban topography*. After a detailed theoretical description of “feminine flânerie”, which implies a special relation between women and space, the author discovers traces of this concept in the journalistic and fictional writing of (in this respect) V. Woolf’s Slovene predecessor Zofka Kveder. Using the city as a means for discovering gender implications of the social space and for representing the (partly autobiographical) experience of a woman in patriarchal society can be read in Kveder’s literary depictions of Trieste, Bern, Munich, Prague and Zagreb as settings for the protagonists, i.e. the emancipated young women. This spatial-gender configuration reveals the transgression of “the traditional boundaries between the male [masculine] and feminine spaces, as well as between urban and rural/local spaces” in Kveder’s writing.

Following Mullaney’s reading of the cultural meanings of the city which are suggested by the spatial location of the Renaissance theatre as well, Tomaž Toporišič’s article *(Re)staging the rhetorics of space* is focused on three stage events of Slovene post- or retro-Avant-garde movements, based on a post-modern reading of the past, in order to show their presenting and subversively deconstructing the cultural(-historical) narrations that have constructed the identity of the Slovene community (including the post-socialist period). By “using signs from the peripheries, these artistic events generate new meanings, structures and texts that invade the center” (Ljubljana) precisely in its cultural-spatial sense.

Finally, the relation between power and space in literary imagery is pointed out in Alena Čatović’s article *The rhetoric of space in Ottoman lyric poetry*: her analysis of Ottoman *gazel* and *nasib* (a lyric introduction to *qasida*) in poetic works written between the fifteenth and the late nineteenth centuries shows how poetic representations of the distance between the beloved and the lover can be read as the distance between the monarch and the slave. This relation becomes more obvious through the code of spatial symbols and metaphors that form the opposition between Istanbul as the spatial centre of power and desolate space that motivates desire.

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