

PRISTINA AND THE YALE SYNDROME IN ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

After 1945, Pristina as the new capital of the country was represented with two special and crucial cases of the emergence of modern architecture. The first one is that modernism in Pristina which appeared late, i.e., after the Second World War. The second one, with a chronological order and still not 'matured' what is known as the 'white' modernism in literature, brutalism began and was presented through marvelous works in the capital city. Thus, Pristina leaves us with the impression of an experimental field which combines two phases of modern architecture, i.e., before the white phase was over, brutalism had already begun to surprise in an artistic level with its presence in Pristina. Therefore, we can say that cases like this are rare because for a short period of time (about two decades) there was a tremendous development of European modernism, especially when taking into account the fact that modernism in Pristina began almost from scratch after the war.

The aim of this research is to understand and explain the momentum, the reason and the story behind it, and how it came to such a completely unexpected turn in the architecture of the capital that brutalism was presented through capital works such as 'Rilindja' printing house. It is also important to follow the impact of 'Rilindja' printing house construction on embracing brutalism in Pristina's later architecture. In order to answer these questions, we will have to follow the path of one architect, that of Georgi Konstantinovski.

Keywords: Pristina, brutalism, architecture, Georgi Konstantinovski, Yale.

1 New capital, new architecture: Modernism in Pristina

Modernism in the city of Pristina was introduced with a delay of almost two decades, only after the Second World War in its most tragic way. The motto used to define the architectural frameworks of the capital was '*destroy the old to build the new*'. It was the period of the establishment of the new political regime—socialism, and this is the reason why everything had to start from scratch, even in architecture. This best explains why almost everything had to be destroyed from the architectural past of the newly proclaimed capital. (Sadiki, 2020, p.22-24).

Thus, Pristina as the new capital of the country for a short period of time after 1945 recognized on its expense the '*whiteness*' of international style. New urban plans and squares, wide streets, residential and administrative buildings, schools and factories with straight lines, flat roofs, and white color marked the new century architecture. Functionality, rationality and building standardization were another motto presented in the architectural works of the time (Fig. 1, 2, 3). Therefore, the international style dominated for a short period of time in the new architecture of Pristina. A new form of social life and international style in architecture was executed. In a word, a completely new architectural situation was created and modernism could be clearly seen in the face of the city. (Jerliu, Navakazi, 2018, p.63-64).

From what it was achieved in such a short period of time is that the capital new architecture was concerned with the sense of the light, the practical, simplicity and purism. Lightness, flexibility and openness were

associated with the newly used slogan: rationality, functionality, and standardization. All of this lead to liberation from the weight of the traditional architecture.



Figure 9. Pristina before 1950



Figure 10. Pristina, urban plan of 1953



Figure 11. Pristina- destroying the old to build the new (modern) architecture

Moreover, modernism also meant the creation of a new unified metropolitan culture. A notion like this clearly implies the dominance of modernism programmatic concept. Rationality and functionality were qualities that were given first priority. In this aspect, they both were interpreted in a broad sense: as a culture that anticipated a future society, rationally (newly) organized, made up of people with equal rights and common interests, and known as ‘brotherhood’.



a)



b)



c)

Figure 12. Modernism in Pristina, streets and square

Generally speaking, the capital’s architecture was now new and quite different compared to the one from a decade earlier. (Fig. 4) The contrast with tradition was enormous, the rejection of ornament and the use of flat roofs, concrete, glass and white color pointed to a deliberate tendency toward innovation, as do the employment of industrial construction techniques, functional floor planes and high quality of fittings. The new architecture achieved to create a relation between the interior and the exterior, and private space was matched with the public realm.

In conclusion, the newly created architecture in Pristina was almost radical in terms of its design; it was able to present a number of salient features that were fundamental to the work of avant-garde architects in general. Flexibility, mobility and dynamism, for instance, as essential elements in Bauhaus concept of modern architecture were to blame for the totally new look of buildings in the capital.

2 Konstantinovski and the Yale Syndrome

Let us say that fate was on the side of the technical director of ‘Rilindja’ printing house– Ali Govori (Konstantinovski when interviewed) in the early 70s, who while searching for a serious architect to design the printing house building ended up in the “UNDERGROUND” office of the famous architect in Skopje Georgi Konstantinovski.

Georgi Konstantinovski had completed his Master's degree in Architecture at Yale University in 1965 under the tutorship of Paul Rudolph and Serge Chermayeff. On the other side, visiting and studying the work of Luis Kahn and also working shortly for I.M. Pei would be too, quite an experience for the young Konstantinovski during his stay at Yale School of Architecture. All of these experiences were of a tremendous importance in his educational path. On his return to Skopje, as he later admits, his aim was to introduce new ideas he had learnt from Rudolph, Chermayeff, Kahn and I.M. Pei. (Lozanovska, 2015, p.149-150).

Konstantinovski was influenced by Paul Rudolph building designs that respond to light and shade. He admired Rudolph because he thought that Rudolph sublimated ornament into the very surface of the buildings. The hammered surface at A&A is indeed a type of built-in ornament or decoration. We can see that Konstantinovski started to follow his steps later into his buildings. Konstantinovski acquired from Rudolph the well-known motto: 'monumentality, symbolism, decoration and so on-age-old human needs-are among the architectural challenges that modern theory has brushed aside.' Following Rudolph, we can see that Konstantinovski's brutalism is not about the frank expression of structure and materials as described by Banham and practiced by LC. (Banham, 1966, p. 32). Rudolph's brutalism should be seen as an expression of hyper-masculinity, it is the working up into form of anxieties about methods of architectural representation and competition with other forms of modernism. Konstantinovski did the same with his buildings (Fig.5). (Elezi, Saliu, 2019, p.188).

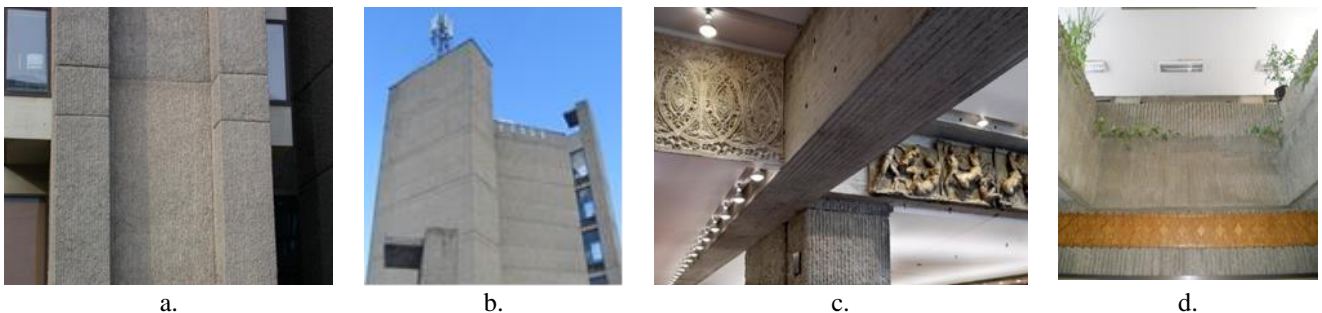


Figure 13. Similarities between AA School of Architecture (a., c.) and Konstantinovski's City Archive 1966 (b., d.)

Influenced by the socio-architectural approach of Chermeyeff, Konstantinovski's (later) buildings produced a new social agenda in both plans and forms. From Chermeyeff he learnt the power of design purpose, highlighted in a socio-political local context that can easily elide disciplined commitment, architecture that presents an image of permanence and monumentality.

In the same year at Yale University, he regularly visited Kahn's Yale Art Centre in 1951. The modernist principle of the exterior expression of the structure and functional planning, plan clarity, spatial sensibility, the purpose of the building which is demonstrated through its form, the relation of individual/collective ideology of its socio-ethical program were some of the details that Konstantinovski learnt from Kahn. Looking to explain Kahn's words 'Silence and Light,' Konstantinovski became familiar with the meaning of joy, touch, sight, intuition, order, singularity, space, place, form, design and plan.

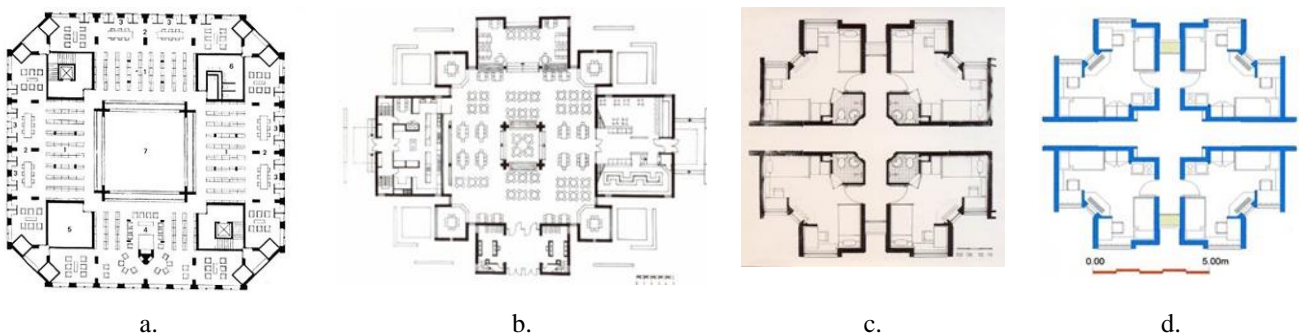


Figure 14. Luis Kahn and Georgi Konstandinovski: "Form and Plan"

Kahn impressed him also with: monumentality, the relation between structure and space, up to shape architecture of light and shadow, and inspired compositions in the poetics of action, in the end to be able to hear the voice of the silence. Konstantinovski orients his work towards Kahn and is influenced by the Yale Art Center. Inspired by Kahn, Konstantinovski aimed toward clarity of the plan. (Fig. 5a,5b,5c,5d). He frames a discussion of his work through Kahn, noting his modernist principle of the exterior expression of the structure and functional planning, whereby the purpose of the building is demonstrated through its form.

After his graduation Konstantinovski worked for Pei, also in awe of Kahn. This is not an exact logic or trajectory regarding how Konstantinovski's architectural ideas evolved, but an index of interests and, as Banham points out, brutalism relations appear because similar preoccupations and interests captivate architects, even if they are in different parts of the world. Working for I.M. Pei in New York, he learnt that architecture is an imaginative synthesis of cultural and political aspirations, and that buildings should be known for the great monumentality, drama and unity, along with their ability to provide a strong focus of the symbol of the city itself. Following Pei, Konstantinovski tends to achieve subtexts of culture memory, history and myth. (Elezi, Saliu, 2019, p.189).

Educated with ideas from Yale School of Architecture, Konstantinovski's comeback marked a new era of creating the architecture of Skopje. The first two buildings that appeared from that 'educational spirit' were the 'Archive Building' (1966) and the 'Goce Delčev Student Dormitory' (1969).

The 'Archive Building' (Fig.7) was Konstantinovski's first large-scale experiment with highly textured surfaces. After it was constructed, it was immediately recognized for its strong urban presence, expressionistic gestures and labyrinthine interiors. It highly announces a new dimension of spatial layering in the form contradiction and its effect on the internal spatial geometry, and it presents a strong conceptual agenda, a spatial concrete structure, and a high standard. It is composed of separate components that constitute the total image, immediately affective, even if complex: the total and articulate image can be first understood as presence in this context equals institutional legitimacy, a will and capacity to manifest existence in concrete terms.



Figure 15. City Archive Building, 1966



Figure 16. Student Dormitory "Goce Delčev," 1969

At 'Goce Delčev Student Dormitory,' (Fig.8) Konstantinovski tends to present a strong image of permanence and high scale of monumentality. Its towers, bridges and silhouette of balconies represent brutalism projecting a brave future of significant architecture shape. It is more than clear that being influenced by the socio-architectural approach of Chermayeff, Konstantinovski's Dormitory produced a new social agenda in both plan and form. For example, four rooms come off their own corridors, creating social neighbor spaces. In contrast to this spatial program of modesty and restraint, the bridges between the towers recall a glamorous and hedonistic side of architecture. Such a preoccupation for the spatial program

is part of the socio-architectural intentions and contributes to the theories of ethics in relation to brutalism in Skopje. (Lozanovska, 2015, p.150-151).

With the two buildings ‘The Archive Building’ (1966) and the ‘Goce Delćev Student Dormitory’ (1969), Konstantinovski made his most important step in his career. He introduced (to the public for the very first time) and established (through his early work) the so-called Yale syndrome in the process of architecture design.

3 The Yale syndrome affects Pristina: ‘Rilindja’ printing house building

The technical director, through Konstantinovski’s commitment to design ‘Rilindja’ printing house, not only found one of the best architects in the region and beyond, but made the Yale syndrome possible through him in making modern architecture take place in Pristina. Konstantinovski is the one to blame that the Yale syndrome occupied Pristina right after Skopje.

The 70s are considered to be the years of an economic, cultural, educational, political and administrative-legal ‘boom’ for Kosovo. As a result, the same achievement would necessarily be required to find a place in the architecture of the future. The image of a new society advanced in the last two decades. It had to be created and presented through architecture. Therefore, for new architectural projects, those in charge would be committed to hire proven professionals, as was the case with the request to design the ‘Rilindja’ printing house and the commitment of Georgi Konstantinovski to design it. Konstantinovski was already a well-known architect, and he was known to the public as "the form-giver" of modern architecture. He epitomized, gave shape and transformed modernism with his two buildings years back in Skopje. In the end, he had brought a new spirit in the creation of architecture in the region.

Konstantinovski received commission for ‘Rilindja’ (1972) as a result of his work ‘The City Archive’ (1966) and ‘Goce Delćev Student Dormitory’ (1969). As he had explained years later, he showed interest in building ‘Rilindja’ because it was a tall building- a building type he found compelling. (Fig. 9, 10, 11).

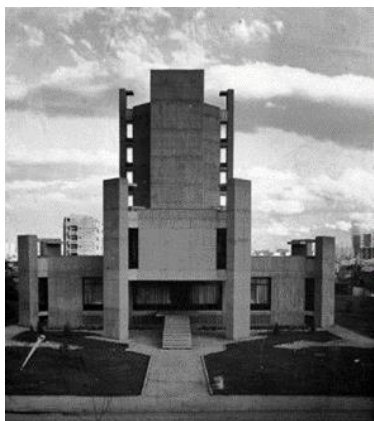


Figure 17. City Archive Building, 1966



Figure 18. Student Dormitory “Goce Delćev”, 1969



Figure 19. Student Dormitory “Goce Delćev”, 1969

Konstantinovski’s large-scale concrete ‘brutalist’ building in Prishtina, with its corrugated concrete surfaces, was celebrated by critics as a breakthrough of modernism. In his new ‘Rilindja’ building he advocated a heroic approach to modernism that extolled individuality, aesthetics and creativity. Here he cultivated the idea that architecture should be saved from the monotony of the international style by reintroducing subjects such as: monumentality, the heavy, decoration and symbolism. He goes on to improve modernism by “humanizing” it, answering the critiques, say that of Aldo van Eyck. He achieved this with ‘human scales’ suspended ceilings and placing office desks near windows, and such an act of humanism in architecture is explained in the employee buffet and the way of sitting in front of the desk, which by looking outside offered relaxation, and in terms its location (sitting) you get the impression that

you have not left work. In this case, this meant taking into account the scale of human body and psychological reactions to form and space. In doing so, he reacted against the objectivity of Bauhaus's functionalist-based teaching and of the international style, instead of adopting a subjective approach that reflected his own point of view and was intended to affect the user physically and emotionally. Many modernists believed in transforming the society through architecture, but they saw this as a collaborative rather than an individual effort. Konstantinovski would choose his individual path to do so. (Fig.12).

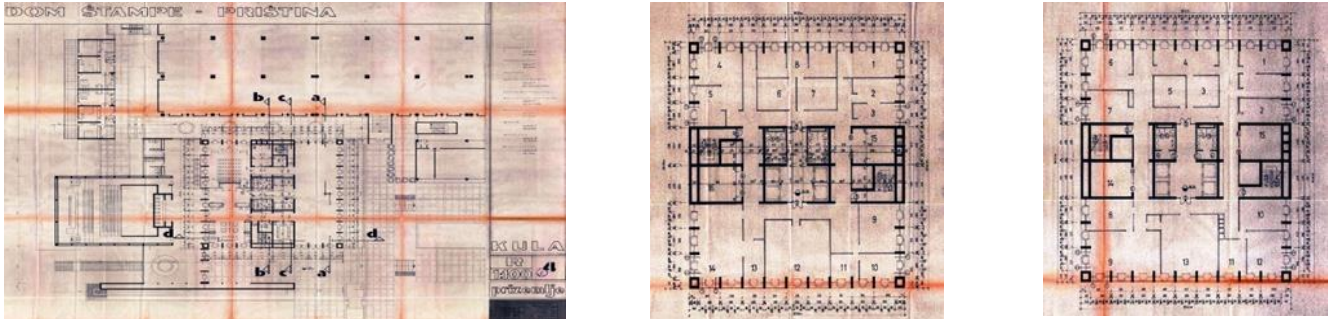


Figure 20. Floorplans of Rilindja, 1972 – Large scale building, producing monumentality and the heavy

Monumentality in architecture, a subject with which modernism has long struggled, was explored by Konstantinovski as well. The big, tall, heavy and dynamic 'Rilindja' building ushered in the concrete monumentality that became known as brutalism. Many other later colleagues achieved a similar type of concrete expression in the 1970s, such as Edo Ravnikar in his 'Technical Faculty Building' (1977) in Pristina, Dragan Kovacević in his 'Public Accounting Building' (1975), as well as Miodrag Pecić at the 'Albanian Institute' (1977), but few were as consistent as Konstantinovski in their approach to it. (Fig. 13, 14, 15). He believed that archetypal symbolic forms used at 'Rilindja' building, could, in addition to stimulating emotional reactions, re-establish historical connections to the past. (Elezi, 2017, p.15-19).



Figure 21. Ravnikar's Technical Faculty Building, 1977



Figure 22. Kovacević's Public Accounting Building, 1975



Figure 23. Pecić's Albanian Institute, 1977

Brutalism at 'Rilindja' can be explained as an explicit honesty or exhibition of structure and materials giving buildings an 'as found' aesthetic. 'Rilindja' is a large-scale building remarkable in presenting the power of design, the value of the design concept and the architect's expertise. The clarity of its architectural statement is a manifestation of this agenda and labor. It wants a dignified architecture to instill new ideas about existing, not merely as belonging to a place, but a purposeful presence and a new way of living. The 'Rilindja' building presents an image of permanence and monumentality that has endured a severe lack of maintenance, new ad-hoc structures and changes to the site and context, a building with a rough corrugated texture that generates constantly shifting patterns of light and shadow. Konstantinovski speaks repeatedly about the quality of light on the walls. His building announces a dimension of spatial layering in contradiction to form and its effect on internal spatial geometry. That makes 'Rilindja' building a visual entity that affects emotions. (Fig.16).

Konstantinovski experimented with decoration as well, though virtually prohibited by modernism; it was of great interest to him as early as his career. Decoration, beside monumentality and symbolism were the primary themes that he pursued in 'Rilindja' building. He concentrated in the well-known Rudolphian wall texture décor, where he plays with nature-light and shadow, and material-brut beton. His search for expression may be considered post-war instalment of architecture's much longer engagement with problems of structure, expression, representation and decoration. His search for expression is materially manifested in the movements through space that he choreographed in such structures as it is 'Rilindja.' Konstantinovski attempted to investigate all subjects that concerned him in almost all of his projects. Though it requires lengthy explanation, it is valuable to reconstruct Konstantinovski's formalist point of view. He had a tendency, shared by many in his circle, to see buildings as 'forms' related to other, often disparate forms from architecture and other disciplines. He claimed that his architecture manifested his individuality, another influence from both, Rudolph and Kahn. (Konstantinovski, interview, 2017).

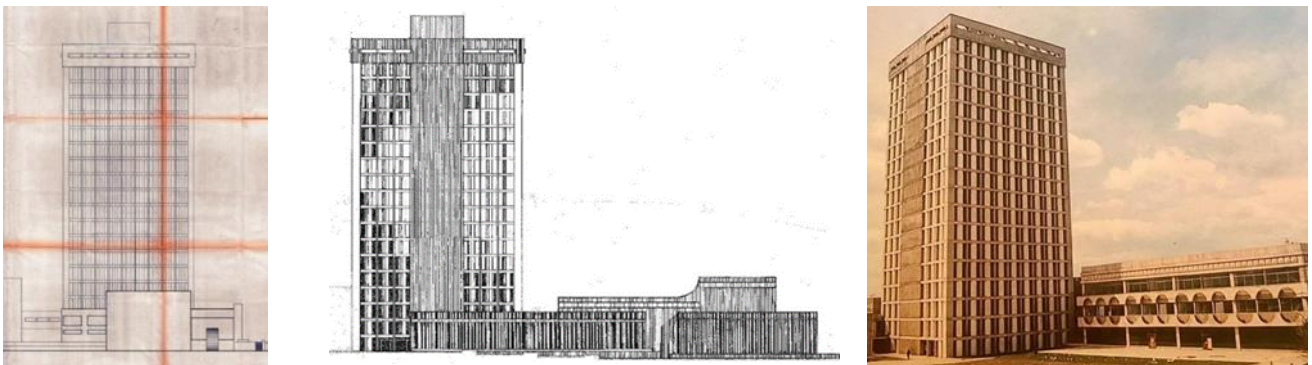


Figure 24. Drawings for Rilindja, 1972 – Elevations and perspective view

Inspired by Kahn, Konstantinovski aims toward the clarity of the plan. The interlocking geometry of the 'Rilindja' building is prismatic and objective, resonating with Kahn's geometry/plan critique. Konstantinovski explains his connection with Kahn, noting his modernist principle of exterior expression of the structure and functional planning, whereby the purpose of the building is demonstrated through its form. He wove together the building's structure and its electrical installations into a basket-like white (marble) exterior framework supported at its base by columns with V-shaped form. These were named by Konstantinovski 'symbols of structure,' 'decoration of time', and a facade that is easy to maintain (Fig.17b).

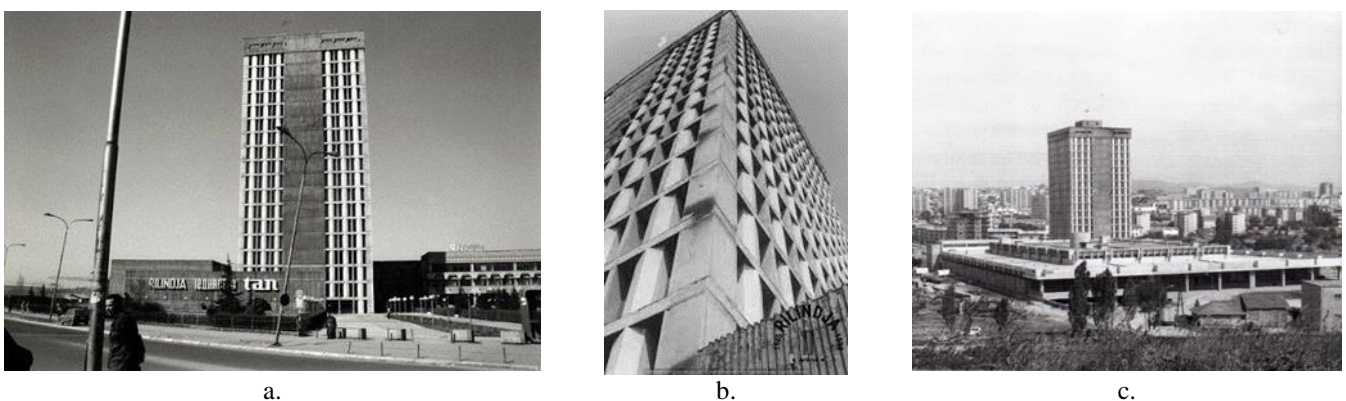


Figure 25. Rilindja exterior photos, 1972 – Façade expression and detail

Unlike horizontally-oriented modernist ribbon windows or flat curtain walls, these windows were vertically disposed (like traditional windows) and deeply recessed within the structure's framework. They formed a modular system derived from particular circumstances rather than from dimensions specified by a manufacturer, as was the case with many mass-produced curtain walls. The more closely the tower is studied, the more apparent its complex dialectic becomes - between function and form, construction and ornament, and new technology and ancient forms. He wove together mechanical and structural elements in

a way that is most evident in the piers attached to the exterior. ‘Rilindja’ building’s novel structural framework created opportunities for spatial innovation. The office floors inside were desirable and flexible ‘open plans’ almost entirely free of internal columns that obstruct most office space in tall buildings. (Fig. 17.a-b-c).

4 Conclusions

Konstantinovski, as a product of Yale School of Architecture, influenced by Rudolph, Chermeyeff, Kahn and Pei, marked a new era of making architecture in Pristina by introducing the so-called Yale syndrome in the process of marking the new path of architecture in Pristina in the 70s.

With ‘Rilindja’ building he was the first promoter and executer of brutalism in Pristina. Under his influence, the international style path in Pristina was changed. Instead of the previous form-follows-form monotony, Konstantinovski would serve more individualistic, imaginative and plastic formal language. With him, the new architecture undertook an aesthetic shift: from thinness to thickness, from light to heavier, from style to brutal, from form to image, from rational to emotional, and from abstract to real.

The architecture that was promoted at ‘Rilindja’ building was an architecture of both formal virtuosity and overweening monumentality, an architecture of institutional power, because almost all types of government buildings, beginning with ‘Rilindja’ were brutalist buildings, referring to the building type as a stylistic dissemination.

Brutalism used by Konstantinovski at ‘Rilindja’ building illustrates the transition between two different definitions of brutalism: ‘from the ethics of ‘honest’ structure to the aesthetics of expressive structural and sculptural effects.’ Brutalism at ‘Rilindja’ building was also mediated by memorability embedded in later works, especially the poetic work of Edvard Ravnikar, Dragan Kovacević and others named mentioned above.

Brutalism on the surface of ‘Rilindja’ building should be interpreted as an expression of hyper masculinity. It is the working up into form of anxieties about methods of architectural representation. ‘Now you have a brave man standing awake and watching the nation’s prosperity,’ concluded Konstantinovski after the building was constructed.

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