



In 2022, Andrija Mutnjaković donated to the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts his studio located at 38 Milka Trnina Street in Zagreb. The donation includes his entire personal estate and all the valuable materials, including sketches and scale models of architectural projects, extensive archival documentation, a large professional library, and numerous artistic and designer objects. Combined with the interior decorated in a highly distinct fashion, the studio and all its belongings synthesize all arts. The studio and all the materials belonging to it have thus become a separate unit of the museum holdings, bearing the name The Andrija Mutnjaković Collection of the Croatian Museum of Architecture of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.



Architectonics of the  
National Library of Kosovo

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Rilind Cocaj

Andrija Mutnjaković creates the library in such a fashion that the building and the exterior belonging to it melt into one. As in any other palace, here urbanistic and architectural excellence interweave as well; this ought to preserve the building's universality and ability to last and endure, independently of the time of building. For Mutnjaković, every building is a palace, and the palace is the city – beauty, and sincerity both to the location and to architecture lie in this synergy. Construction, materialization, and spatiality imply constant exploring of the interrelations between the content and the ambiance values.

Borka Bobovec



**Rilind Cocaj**

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# Architectonics of the National Library of Kosovo



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presented a hundred years of architectural events with one building selected to represent each year. The year 1982 was marked by the realisation of the National Library of Kosovo and represented by a picture and the following words: *Pristina National University Library, by A. Mutnjaković. Designed in 1971 and built between 1974 and 1982. Inspired by Prizren Hammam (1563), it is one of the first buildings to reformulate relations with traditional architecture. The idea of freely bringing together a multitude of volumes, organising and lightening them autonomously, makes this building an easily recognisable landmark. For the first time, people could recognize themselves in a modern building which was not erected on old foundations but in the middle of a park* (Fundamentals catalogue, la Biennale di Venezia 2014).

The established relations between the architecture of the Kosovo Library and the regional traditional architecture of Kosovo encouraged the Getty Foundation to financially support (2016) the renovation of the library building as part of the *Keeping It Modern* project, with the following explanation: *Few modern buildings connect the past and present as flawlessly and span multiple cultures as expressively as Kosovo's National Library in Pristina. Reflecting on the region's diverse heritage and distinct cultural spirit, Croatian architect Andrija Mutnjakovic (b. 1929) sought to create an authentic national architectural expression when he designed the building in 1971. (Keeping it Modern: Grants Awarded 2016). The reconstruction project is in its final stages and is taking place under the collaboration between Andrija Mutnjaković and Rilind Cocaj.*

The citizens of Pristina and Kosovo truly recognised the National Library of Kosovo as a symbol of the city and the region. In recognition of this architectural work, in 2022 at the

Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts the mayor of Pristina, Mr. Pärparim Rama, presented Andrija Mutnjaković with the honorary Key of the City - *Key to the Capital City Pristina for his outstanding work in designing The National Library of Kosovo.*

The book *Architectonics of the National Library of Kosovo* by architect Rilind Cocaj accepts regional architecture in the sense of a project dispenser, but indicates that we need something more when creating contemporary architecture: the composition of the project is based on the contemporary thesis of structural architecture, the design of the project follows the radical tendencies of Art Informel, the construction of the project reflects the style of contemporary Constructivism, the experience of its architecture is close to artistic expressionism, the library's ambience possesses the tendencies of the Renaissance ideal city. For Cocaj, the five listed shapers are not enough; he also considers the influence of the then European avant-garde movement New Tendencies on the creation of the project. All this has been realised in the author's complete architectural opus, and it is precisely where the essence of Mutnjaković's creation of the National Library of Kosovo comes from.

## Foreword

**Maurizio Meriggi**

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### The Author and the Hero

Rilind Cocaj's book deals with the architecture of a work – Andrija Mutnjaković's National Library of Kosovo in Pristina. In his book, the Library is the "hero" of the space tale, while Andrija Mutnjaković is the "author".

This narrative structure reflects the working method followed by Rilind Cocaj in his doctoral thesis in architectural composition at the IUAV (University Institute of Architecture of Venice), where PhD students are required to analyse the theoretical thought of an architect through the study of one of his works.

The method has several affinities with scientific research in the humanities field and literature, hence the title of this introduction, which quotes Michail Bakhtin's essay "The Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity".

The study of the relationship between the work and the architect, between the hero and the author of Bakhtin, opens a series of semantic worlds that show the architecture of artistic and technical creation set at the base of the process of architectural composition as a specific and holistic discipline.

Rilind Cocaj's work follows a precise and clear track by proposing three scenarios, three acts, which develop three almost alternative plots through which the story of the relationship between the author and the work unfolds: the Library as an expression of the "neo-avant-garde", the Library as a "bio-urban" centre, the Library as the centre of the "Ideal City".

In all three acts, an alter ego of the building appears in the background, as if it was a voice out of the scene - the apparent vernacularity of the Library architecture.

The thesis thus stages a small drama on the disputed identity of the Library, which reflects the versatility of the author's thought.

When Rilind asked me, in 2017, to pursue his doctoral thesis, I didn't know either the work or the author. From that moment on, Andrija Mutnjaković's Library has become a permanent presence in my imagination – that is, a cornerstone of the images collection placed in the architecture of our memory, becoming catalysts of meanings around which are structured the synapses of our reasoning and references.

I saw the Library again in the summer of 2018 in New York, at the MoMA, where a plastic model dominated a corner of the exhibition "Towards a Concrete Utopia".

In that context, walking through the rooms, a panorama of extraordinarily eloquent objects and architectural signs opened up, giving the sense of artistic research in architecture in socialist Yugoslavia, where the architecture of the "neo-avant-garde" has become the interpreter of a new social model.

This episode is about the first act of the drama.

In the spring of 2019, I met the author in Zagreb in his studio museum to interview with Andrija Mutnjaković together with Rilind. Among the drawings shown by Andrija, the plastic models of his other projects and his books (*Biourbanizam*, *Endemska Arhitektura*, *Intencijska Arhitektura*, *Kinetička Arhitektura*), the "other" identity of the Library (the hero) - the "biourbanistic" one, was revealed.

We talked about the Russian avant-garde (Andrija's first love, known through El Lissitzky's book 1929 *Rußland: Architektur für eine Weltrevolution*); he also told us about his participation in the USSR in a conference on themes of the socialist city and of the interest his work arose there.

A trace of the appreciation of his work in URSS remains in the chapter dedicated to his "biourbanism" in Yuri Lebedev's book

Архитектурная Бионика, in which Mutnjaković vision of the city follows the chapter with the Soleri's "arcology".

This meeting is about the second act of the drama.

But this is just literature.

To get in touch with the hero of the story, Rilind invited me in the autumn of 2021 to give a lecture in Pristina on one of our educational works in progress at the Politecnico di Milano on the theme of the completion of the unfinished Campus of the University of Pristina by Baskim Femi, Bogdan Bogdanovic and Andrija Mutnjaković, which in our imagination was linked to the Campus Martius project by Giovan Battista Piranesi.

On that occasion, I finally could perceive with my senses the enveloping emotions that the spatial story of the Library can arouse in its entirety.

At that moment, the sense of drama was revealed: partly from the discourses heard at Pristina University, and partly from Andrija's account during our first meeting in his Studio Museum about the criticism directed at the Library project because of its "Ottomanizing" domes – although Andrija told me it was more of a reference to a prototype out of time like those of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. During that journey in Pristina, I also visited the Ottoman old towns of Pristina and Prizren and the "megastructural" centre of Yugoslavian Pristina.

The Library resulted to my eyes as the catalyst for many identities, which the author intelligently wanted to evoke and represent in his work.

The "facture" of the building and its spatial-planimetric matrix are expressions of the neo-avant-garde (the optical mesh of the brise soleil and the proto-computational layout of the plan).

Its appearance, however, is ambiguously vernacular as the domes are repeated metrically and rhythmically with a parametric logic that translates an articulated spatial and functional program.

Its interiors are those of a Diocletian's Palace, in the form of a City. But the Library could also be the Temple – of the ideal city of Croatian architects who worked in Italy during the Renaissance, on which Andrija worked so much in several of his books.

In its entirety, the Library building is the witness of an idea of a bio-urban city that is yet to come and that is there, waiting to be built – hopefully – by future generations, and that this book by Rilind Cocaj seems to hope for.

## Foreword

**Luca Monica**

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### Mutnjaković's Yugoslav architecture

This study by Rilind Cocaj on Andrija Mutnjaković is part of an ongoing series of research within the PhD program in Architectural Composition at IUAV University of Venice. Supervised primarily by Luciano Semerani, this research focuses on the architecture of some of the most significant figures in Yugoslavian architecture. The interest in this area is driven by a figurative and cultural affinity with the roots of the School of Venice, reflected in three fundamental characteristics.

The first characteristic is rooted in a geopolitical proximity to a post-war context that sought a unique interpretation of modernity and social commitment, bridging architecture and democracy, in some respects similar to a vision sometimes sought in different forms also in Italy.

The second characteristic is an architectural research that retains its original, even ancestral, qualities, characteristics between figuration and typology, in a reference to the tradition placed in visual signs and even very distant memories that are striking in their immediacy.

Third, for a persistence of formal research influenced between the folds of a Viennese Secession that transcends into the European avant-garde and contemporary times.

These architects have in fact built a genealogical arc of original coherence: Jože Plečnik (1872-1957, edited by Federica Zanco); Edvard Ravnikar (1907-1993, edited by Filippo Bricolo); Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010, edited by Elena Re Dionigi). In fact, this architect and this architecture of the National Library of Kosovo in Pristina (1971-1982), conceived within the Yugoslav Federation, was missing to continue the investigation towards different generations.

### Architecture and geopolitics

As is known, the independence of the Yugoslav Federation dates back to 1945, with a clear socialist orientation originating from the partisan liberation war, with interesting characteristics unique in Europe. This period lasted until 1991, ending in a war that divided the federation into several states, leading to deep and cruel ethnic divisions, in a so-called "balkanization" process that only stabilized in 1999.

A key text for understanding this beginning is Alberto Mambriani's book *L'architettura moderna nei paesi balcanici*, (Modern Architecture in the Balkan Countries), published in 1969. It was part of an intriguing series on contemporary architecture curated by Leonardo Benevolo, aimed at exploring marginal and distant contexts, integrating the most current architectural trends and figures with the historical and traditional backdrop of the region. This approach prevents notable architectural achievements from being isolated within contemporary magazines. This text by Mambriani predates the National Library and the work of Mutnjaković. It emerged from the crucible of IUAV in Venice under Samonà and the enduring connections of that school with the neighboring Balkan region. The book seeks to uncover a tradition that is both noble and rural, almost provisional, and perhaps even nomadic, seeking a courtly, with a new political and democratic conception, devoted to a European, popular, shared, but also necessarily modern dimension, included in the figurative experiences of the post-war post-avant-garde.

All this seems to configure the right premise for Mutnjaković's work and the architecture of the Library. Overall, the Yugoslav context described by Mambriani appears as a continuous exploration of constructional-structural