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**TITLE:** **Learning from 'La Riviera'**  
**Landscape perception as a decoder to analyze and**  
**interpret the landscape experience of the motor**  
**tourist**

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## Learning from 'La Riviera'

### Landscape perception as a decoder to analyze and interpret the landscape experience of the motor tourist

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Judging from the entries to the International Urban Design competition dedicated to the Albanian Southern Coast-Strip launched by Atelier Albania in October 2014, the most common trend among most teams was the desire to preserve the landscape of the entire Riviera and the interventions set forth in the proposals were very discreet, almost imperceptible. The only tangible sign expressing a conscious will to manage, through planning and design actions, the improvement of the urban condition in the old settlements and stimulate the economy for the entire region, was the proposal to introduce "land art" elements, new street furniture and road signage. Similarly, the results and the general opinion of the jury and experts showed a commitment to non-intervention. In short, no matter despite the political pressure to boost the economy through the development and strengthening of tourism along the Albanian Riviera and the related need to improve infrastructures and services, most planners, designers, architects and landscape designers that took part in the competition and presented a proposal, took a stand in favor of minimum impact-intervention.

Among others, the zero-impact attitude adopted by the winning project for lot 2 (Burea Bas Smets – Vadim Vosters – Transsolar – Erik de Waele – Son Engineerin & Construction) stands out for its focus on landscape preservation. The chosen strategy to guarantee tourism throughout the year is to "reinforce the cultural landscape" by transforming the

Albanian Southern Riviera into a DRIVER'S experience: like in the nostalgic French Riviera or, even better, in the spooky Mullholland drive in Los Angeles (a product of the Hollywood movie industry, made popular worldwide by the cryptic David Lynch movie in 2001) the landscape is not accessible but it is reserved solely for gaze and contemplation (MARINI 2008 p. 309).

Through popular precedents such as the French Riviera, the Pacific Coast Highway 1 and Mulholland Drive, and using as inspiration and interpretation tools the movies that transformed them into iconic experiences and established them as touristic attractions, this article intends to reflect upon the Riviera as a touristic landscape experience and on the use of landscape perception as a decoder to analyze and interpret the landscape experience of the motor tourist.

#### **The START line**

The INTERNATIONAL URBAN DESIGN COMPETITION for the Southern Coast-Strip and Surrounding Settlements – RIVIERA in Albania<sup>1</sup>, is one of the most relevant initiatives of the last decade in Albania, as it attempted to address the need to generate new economy in the region and reinforce and preserve the natural and cultural assets present in the country. Meeting these sometimes contradictory objectives, and therefore attempting to boost tourism whilst protecting and recovering the natural and cultural assets of the coastal-strip, is always a delicate task and the choice to open a public discussion through an international



Fig1 / Rendering of the project "Reactive Riviera,"  
source / Re-Active Riviera competition panels  
Source: Metropolis, Sealine.

competition was certainly a wise strategy. Given the strong economic pressure imposed by the building industry and, in particular, by the tendency towards the strengthening of tourism, and given the local tendency to operate fast and without the mitigation of planning instruments, the risks at stake are numerous and imminent. According to the competition's brief objectives the priorities for the coastal area involve mainly the urban and economic condition of the villages along the coast and the seaside belt - with its beaches and potential touristic attractions - and the connections between them; the main problems being the progressive abandonment of the villages, the lack of service-equipment, adequate infrastructures, signage for storytelling and orientation. (Fig.2)

Given all the above mentioned risks, it came as no surprise that the main strategy among the selected design teams was the desire to operate discretely and always leaving a margin of indeterminacy. The proposals were subtle suggestions that paved the way to an extended and continued discussion. Also the final results, and the general opinion of jury members and experts, showed a commitment to non-intervention. Within this common attitude it seems worth mentioning the projects for lot 2 (Team 1 - finalist: "Reactive Riviera" -

Metropolis - Sealine - Polis University - Ferrara University; Team 2 - winner: "Albania Riviera Drive" Burea Bas Smets - Vadim Vosters - Transsolar - Erik de Waele - Son Engineerin & Construction), as they had similar intuitions but slightly different approaches to the area. The winning project - "Albania Riviera Drive" - consisted mainly in redrawing the existing landscape and proposing few low impact interventions along the coastline - small sea activities, some contemplation and/or recreational objects scattered along the Riviera Drive - while attempting to preserve the unique landscape conditions and reinforce urban structures and historic polarities.

The "Reactive Riviera" project, on the other hand, was very exhaustive in terms of analysis and deep understanding of the area, and its strategy went beyond the lot and the region itself, taking into consideration the role and the condition of the area within the national and international context. In fact the project wisely considered the Blue European Corridor, its strategic role, and the advantages of its location in the Mediterranean basin. Consequently, accessibility and infrastructural networks<sup>2</sup> were key elements of the proposal and a strategy based on specific local conditions, guaranteed a flexible approach that could "react" to the peculiarities of

1 / The completion was promoted in October 2014 by Atelier Albania, mandated by the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism and the Office of the Prime Minister.

2 / It is important to point out that in the "Reactive Riviera" project the term infrastructure was not referred strictly to new roads and service networks, but rather intended in a broader sense; it was in fact referred to the rehabilitation and restoration of existing walking itineraries and pedestrian accesses to beaches, archaeological sites and Natural reserves.



environmental characteristics and socio-economic conditions of each site and respond to the needs and requirements of local communities and municipalities. The proposed time-scale based strategy offered a comprehensive approach aimed at steering a sustainable and gradual development of the strategic program for the coastal areas, while preserving the natural landscape and the cultural heritage through low impact interventions (Sealine, Metropolis, 2014). (Fig 1)

The above mentioned project shared with the winning team an intuition in terms of 'observation' and 'interpretation' of the site: firstly in the identification of different transversal sections (within Lot 2 itself), each one forming a system characterized by peculiar natural, morphologic and anthropic conditions. The team led by Burea Bas Smets called them landscape sequences - the entire coast is then perceived as a meeting area in between two parallel linear systems, the coastline and the coastal road, which in section appear as lines separated by a variable rock formation (Bas Smets, 2014).

While the Metropolis-Sealine team defined them as potential transversal networks<sup>3</sup> - natural, historic, landscape, cultural, religious or destination corridors that offer different landscape conditions, morphology and relationship between

road and coastline, villages and beaches, which could potentially work as systems contributing to the ecological, financial and social sustainability of the area (Sealine, Metropolis, 2014). (Fig. 3, 4)

### The DRIVE

Given the very high standards of the two entries, what I believe determined the choice of the jury was the poetic reference to the French Riviera and Mulholland Drive at the very beginning of the presentation by Burea Bas Smets. The reference to the above mentioned scenic roads seems right in principle if we consider that, in order to meet the main objective – which was to preserve the landscape of the entire Riviera but still attract tourists and boost the economy - the strategy adopted by the winning team was to consider the "Riviera Drive" as a linear system connecting all the natural elements of the area and the cultural/manmade landscape<sup>5</sup>. Moreover this seems to imply that the Albanian Southern Riviera would have to be transformed into a DRIVER'S experience and, naturally, the kind of tourist that ought to be interested in this kind of attraction would be the motor tourist. (Fig 7/8)

Given the morphology of the coast and the presence of rock formation that acts as a topographic boundary and prevents the road from running close

3 / The strategy adopted by the "Reactive Riviera" project team was to associate to the common words: culture, religion, history and nature, the term landscape; as an attempt to renew and remark the importance of an Albanian Patrimony within a euro-Mediterranean network.

4 / Characterized by sea, mountains, valleys, caves, canyons, waterfalls and springs.

5 / Characterized by villages, castles, religious buildings and terraced cultivations.



Fig2 / Image of the landscape in Borsh, Albanian Adriatic Riviera  
source / Metropolis

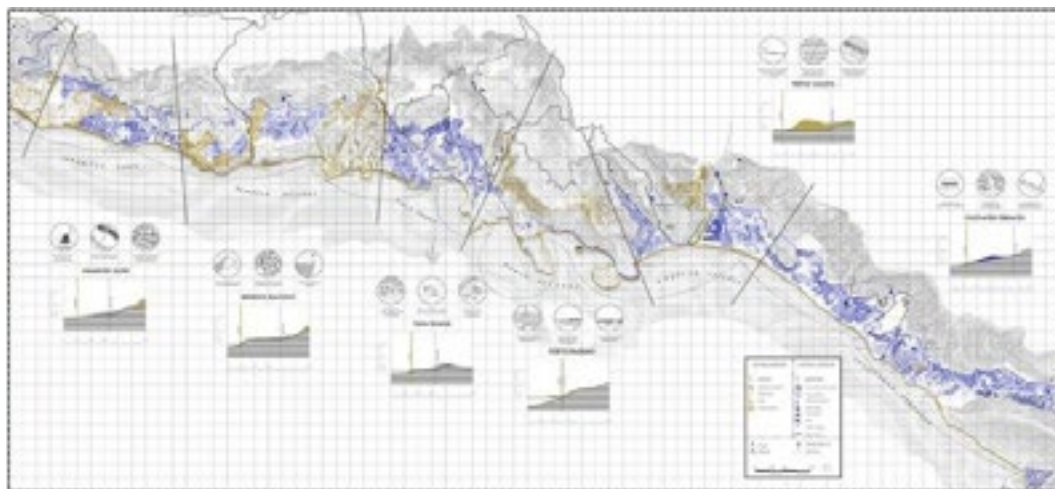


Fig3 / Landscape sequences "Albania Riviera Drive" project  
source / Burea Bas Smets



Fig4 / Potential transversal networks "Reactive Riviera" project  
source / Re-Active Riviera competition panels



Fig5 / Modern day Claude Mirror / Fig6 left / "Bad Gastein" by Emil Ludwig Löhr 1876  
 Fig6 right / "Frame It"– Ein Ort setzt sich insBild project / sources internet

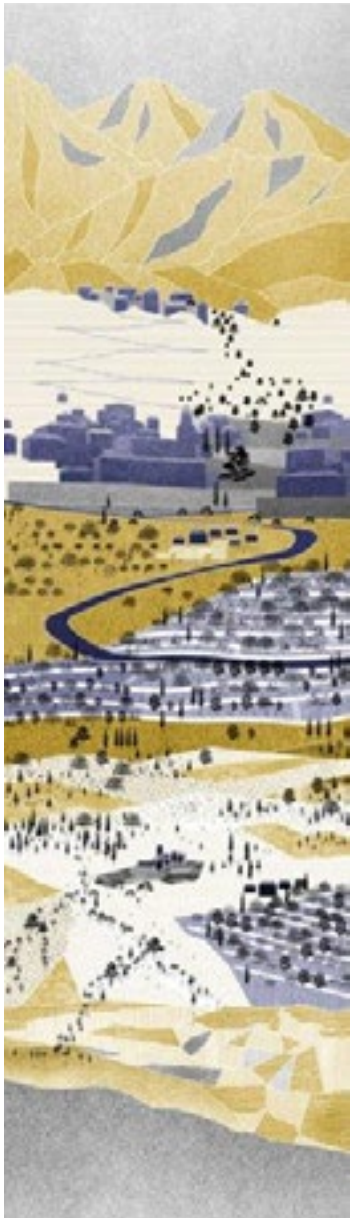


Fig7 / Concept poster for the "Albania Riviera Drive" project / source Burea Bas Smets  
 Fig8 / French Riviera vintage poster / source internet



Fig9 / The sharp curves along Mulholland Drive, Los Angeles, CA  
source / internet

to the coastline in several portions of the coastal strip, according to the winning team the "Riviera Drive" has the potential to become more than a simple connecting infrastructure, specifically a dynamic sequence that visually connects contrasting environments and offers privileged panoramic views of the landscape. The journey along the "Riviera Drive" then becomes a landscape experience and the main attractions are not the possible destinations, nor are the historic landmarks and towns along the way, but the "DRIVE" itself turns into a touristic attraction. The contemporary motor tourist (driver/rider) is guided by the predetermined constriction of the road trajectory and directed toward privileged panoramic spots, where he can gaze and contemplate<sup>6</sup> nature as it unfolds before his/her eyes, but never really feel as part of it. The landscape perceived by the motor tourist appears as a landscape

painting framed by predefined scenic outlooks along the road, and the view from a moving car appears as a landscape-film, a landscape in motion framed by the side window, the wind shield or the rear view mirror of the car<sup>7</sup>. In this kind of journey "man becomes a passive observer<sup>8</sup> - a spectator - and nature a distant and fascinating exteriority" (Jakob, 2009, p.112)<sup>9</sup>.

If nothing else, Mulholland Drive and the French Riviera Drive might indeed share with the Albanian coastal-strip the potential to become a Twenty-first Century picturesque travelers'<sup>10</sup> pilgrimage destination, thanks to its aptitude to offer prepackaged real-life postcards. The Albanian Riviera drive would then become a set of predetermined panoramic spots where we can access virtual vending machines selling readymade landscape-images. We could identify and reproduce

6 / Translation from Italian text, Marini, 2008 p. 309. In Marini's book this definition of landscape as gaze and contemplation is used to distinguish between the conception of landscape referred to representation alone, like in paintings, and the more comprehensive meaning which includes in the physical space - and assigns a central importance to - the transformations and the people who operate the latter by living the space day by day.

7 / Through the rear view mirror of the car drivers can perceive at once the landscape they are approaching and the landscape they left behind. On the city seen through the rear view mirror Cfr. "Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles" (USA - Documentary, Julian Cooper (director), Malcolm Brown (producer) (1972).

8 / The vision from a moving car or bus breaks the frontal logic - framed and still - allowing for a broader view - panoramic and dynamic (Jakob, 2009 p. 119). We are passive observers because even as drivers we only have the illusion of control over visual space. In reality it's the road that defines the field of movement of the car and therefore the car is imposing its point of view on both the driver and the passengers.

9 / See also (Bianconi, 2008 pp. 36-37).

10 / Landscape paintings were so popular in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century that they gave way to a tourism that attracted rich Europeans toward the countryside looking for landscapes that resembled the picturesque paintings themselves.

11 / Our visual experience of landscapes is anticipated by landscape images diffused around Medias. We confuse images with reality and instead of images portraying reality, life imitates the images and videos of real life accessible by new and old visual media users; we value as authentic what we see through technological means more than what we see through our own eyes. In his book "Il Paesaggio" Michael Jakob argues that in the contemporary society everything exists and is recognized through images. The world around us is represented through two kinds of landscape-images: the images that we find on magazines, billboards and television that publicize touristic attractions through which we discover and memorize landscapes; and the endless landscape-images that we produce through photographs and video recordings when we travel. JAKOB, 2009 p.11 and 115-120.



Fig10 / Mulholland Drive as a metaphor: scene from the movie where the character Rita/Camilla uses a shortcut to reach one of the expensive houses set back and hidden from the road / source internet

the landscape images we saw online and instantly post them on our favorite social network<sup>11</sup>, contributing to the creation of the new constructed iconic image for the Albanian Riviera.

Motor tourists would park their car at the scenic overlook rest areas and use their Smartphone photographic apps as modern day Claude mirrors<sup>12</sup>, to frame the same scenario they saw on their computer while planning their next holiday destination. Or even better, audio guides would accompany them on their journey, alerting them with an acoustic sign when they need to stop<sup>13</sup>, telling them where to direct their gaze, and instructing them on how to frame the predetermined landscape view appearing before their eyes<sup>14</sup>. (Fig 5/6)

**DRIVING on the 'EDGE'**

*Mulholland Drive (LA) and the film Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001).*

Although the Albanian Riviera in some parts may resemble Mulholland Drive, with its sharp turns and dangerous blind curves, in practical terms it is substantially different. In fact if we take a closer look at the reasons behind the popularity of the reference in question and at its cultural context, it starts losing ground and appears as a superficial comparison. First of all Mulholland Drive is not located along a coast. Although it shares with a coastal road the characteristic of working as a "limit", it's not a limit between land and coastline, but rather between the beautiful

homes and sublime nature of the Santa Monica hills, and the valley - a line running along the edge between the real life and the make believe life of the Hollywood movie industry. Moreover in order to stand a comparison with Mulholland Drive, the Albanian Riviera would need to have a pop culture background that cannot be forcefully injected or imitated: Albanian culture lacks the myth and the movies, which in the case of Mulholland Drive transformed the road itself, and the experience of driving along it, into an attraction<sup>15</sup>. (Fig 9)

Mulholland Drive is a scenic road that follows the ridgeline of Eastern Santa Monica Mountains and Hollywood hills, connecting two sections of US route 101 and leading to Pacific Coast Highway 1 near Malibu, "taking Angelenos from the city to the ocean"<sup>16</sup>. Along the winding road the driver can gaze over the panoramic views of the city, the mountains and the ocean. Behind each blind curve the surrounding landscape is revealed to him in all its overwhelming power. There are only but a few safe spots where the driver can stop and contemplate the scenic overlooks (like the outlook offering one of the 1000 views over the Hollywood sign), and the landscape is mostly experienced in motion. But Mulholland drive hasn't gained its reputation solely for its scenic properties, it withholds meanings that are deeply rooted in its morphology and the culture of the Hollywood movie industry: its Metaphorical geography<sup>17</sup> is what transformed it into a driving experience, and David Lynch is the movie director who





Fig11 / Grace Kelly and Cary Grant along the French Riviera in "To Catch a Thief" / source internet  
 Fig12 / French Riviera vintage poster / source internet

consecrated it as a dark and mysterious icon.

Mulholland Drive is in fact a 50-mile long road that winds its way along the spine of the Santa Monica Mountains, offering amazing views of the San Fernando Valley and the Hollywood Hills, where the rich - and, sometimes famous - reside<sup>18</sup>. At the base of the hills are the people trying to climb the ladder of stardom; the road on

the "edge", seen as a metaphor, represents "the path on the journey to stardom"<sup>19</sup>. Thanks to its geography and morphology and to the context, the road serves as a perfect backdrop for Hollywood Movies. It is no surprise then that David Lynch chose to title his masterpiece (Mulholland Drive, 2001) after the road itself, which serves as a metaphor for some of the main "interpretations" behind the storyline. (Fig 10)

12 / The Claude mirror (In Italian "Vetro Claude" - from the name of the painter Claude Lorrain) was a tool which inherited his name from the famous Seventeenth Century picturesque landscape painter Claude Lorrain, who painted predominantly central Italy landscape views. His paintings were considered more beautiful than the landscapes they were reproducing. If this mirror was held in the right position it could frame a scenario similar to o paintings by Claude Lorrain. In fact Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century picturesque tourists and painters used to bring along the Claude mirror or Black mirror in order to faithfully reproduce the effect of the paintings they had seen. This tool was a carry on size mirror, with a convex surface tinted grey. If, while giving his/her back to the panoramic view, the observer/tourist looked at the Claude mirror held in front of him, he/she could see the reflection of the landscape, looking better than in reality and resembling the one reproduced in the landscape paintings of the time. The convex shape of the mirror was able to squeeze in the framed field a very wide view, wider than what the human eye could have embraced, and the grayish color of the glass altered the real colors of the landscape, rendering them more pleasing to the eye of the Seventeenth/Eighteenth Century traveler (following the taste and the standards of the picturesque). See also (Bianconi, 2008 pp. 52-53).

13 / Cfr. "Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles" (USA - Documentary, Julian Cooper (director), Malcolm Brown (producer) (1972). In his documentary Banham lands at the LAX Airport and rents a car equipped with a recorded tour guide that shows him around Los Angeles. While Banham drives, the recorded voice gives him directions and delivers information about the city; an acoustic sign played by the recorded tape warns him when it is time to stop the car, or simply direct his attention towards something in particular.

14 / Similar to the task of the British Improvers who would accompany the visitor of the 1700-1800 on site giving them a rectangular glass inserted in a frame with a handle to admire the landscape.

15 / Similar to the myth of Historic Rout 66 which keeps attracting every year herds of pagan pilgrims.

16 / Mulholland Drive is actually only one stretch of the entire extension of the road. In fact the western rural portion is called "Mulholland Highway"; a non-paved portion called "Dirt Mulholland" - not open to motor vehicles - follows and runs until few miles west of S 405 San Diego Freeway, where the actual "Mulholland Drive" begins and, after running parallel to US Highway 101 along the Santa Monica Mountains and passing the Hollywood Hills, ends at Cahunga Boulevard, close to Universal Studios. WIKIPEDIA (2015)

17 / From Your guide to understanding this movie: Mulholland Drive - Blog. [Online] Available online from: <https://rodsmovierants.wordpress.com/2012/05/19/your-guide-to-understanding-this-movie-mulhol/> [Accessed: September 2015].

18 / Many of the most expensive homes of the world can be found along Mulholland Drive, but since they are set back from the road they are not easily visible from the latter.

19 / In one scene of the film Mulholland Drive by D. Lynch, the character Rita/Camilla uses a shortcut to reach one of the expensive houses set back and hidden from the road, symbolically suggesting that this might speed up her journey to stardom. From, Your guide to understanding this movie: Mulholland Drive, op. cit.

20 / In the film scene in question Grace Kelly is not actually driving along the French Riviera; it is what is commonly known as a blue screen driving shot - also known as a process shot. The scene is a typical special effect of the early days of motion pictures, something called "rear window" projection, wherein due to the difficulty of shooting on a moving car, the moving background was filmed separately, then projected onto a screen behind the actors, who sat in a mockup of a car and acted as normal. Thus the illusion and the thrill of the movie scene might appear ruined to contemporary spectators and the act of steering by Grace Kelly - clearly not matching the movement of background - might appear comic.

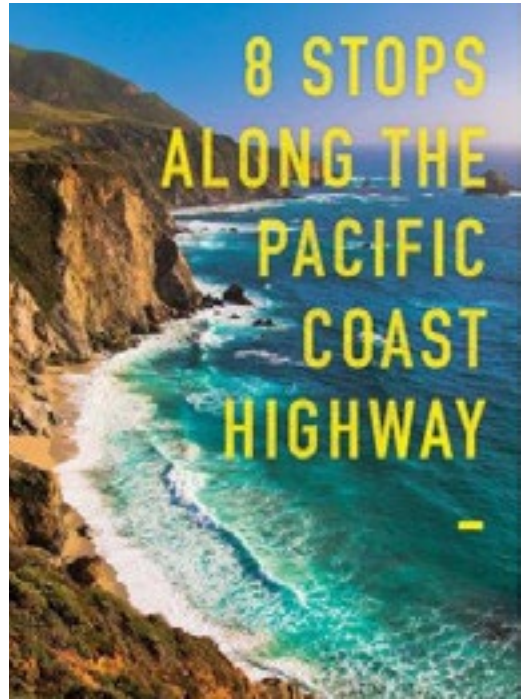
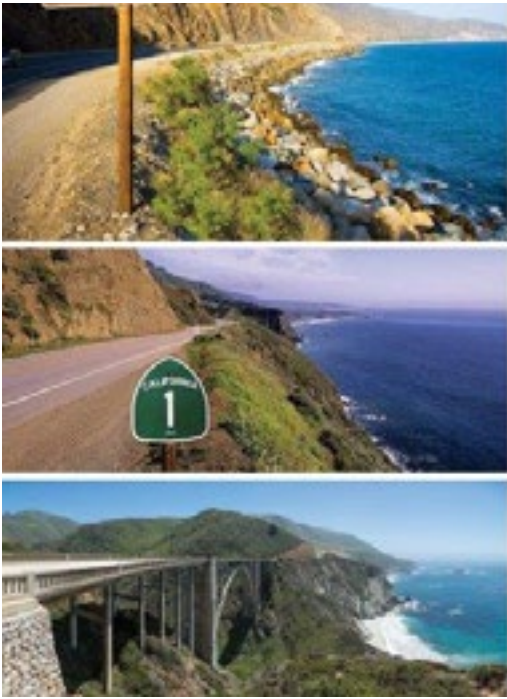


Fig14 / Pacific Coast Highway, California, USA / source internet



Fig13 / Llogara, Albanian Adriatic Riviera / source Metropolis.



Fig15 left / Mulholland Drive street sign from the homonymous movie by David Lynch;  
 Fig15 right / "Mulholland Drive"; opening sequence showing the sharp headlights of the dark limo.  
 source / internet.



Fig16 / "Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio" England 1980, David Hockney / source internet

***The French Riviera (FR) and the film To Catch a Thief (Alfred Hitchcock, 1955).***

The very first reference in the presentation of the lot 2 winning team was an old poster of the French Riviera, with its colorful towns and winding road, the same road that showed a preoccupied – but still composed, dignified and slick – Cary Grant and a fearless and flawless Grace Kelly, virtually speeding on the cliff side, in what today appears as a far too obvious and slightly disappointing a blue screen driving shot<sup>20</sup>. In the Movie To Catch a Thief (1955) the winding, and potentially dangerous, Riviera Drive presents itself as a backdrop to the Hitchcock thriller masterpiece and confers the feeling of danger to the plot, by providing a strong contrast with the colorful, luscious, expensive and classy life in the small towns clinging to the steep slopes of the French Riviera. (Fig 11)

It would certainly be desirable to transform the Albanian Riviera in a colorful, but classy, touristic destination, but apart from the different culture and historic substance, the French Riviera is successful because along it we encounter several cities rich of attractions and services for the tourists, and not just land art sculptures and small scenic outlooks. As a matter of fact the French Riviera is not about the

"DRIVE" itself, or at least only secondarily; the tourists are mostly attracted by the picturesque towns and the small equipped beaches along the coast. I believe that this highlights the importance of such attractions, infrastructures and services to guarantee economic growth and prosperity for the entire region – as long as these services are developed following an informed and sustainable approach. (Fig 12)

***Pacific Coast Highway 1 (California) and the HBO Crime drama television series True Detective. (Cary Joji Fukunaga, Justin Lin, 2014).***

My opinion is that the Albanian Riviera Drive actually shares more similarities with the pacific Coast Highway and the area of the Big Sur, than with Mulholland Drive or the French Riviera Drive First of all in terms of geography and morphology of the coast: just like in the Albanian Riviera, here the road is not always near the coastline due to the steep rock formations that act as topographic boundaries. When the road runs deeper inside the land, the drive crosses Natural parks and springs and offers privileged panoramic points overlooking the natural landscape. In the few instances where the road comes close

21 / Artificial as in Anthropized, modified by men. This includes of course rural landscape and things that seem "naturally" present in our landscape but have an artificial character (water basin of a hydroelectric plant, trees in a forest managed by men, grass in farming land, etc.) (CLÉMENT 2005). For Typological study of landscape see also, BIANCONI 2008, p.22.

22 / "The picturesque found pleasure in roughness and irregularity, and they tried to establish it as a critical category between the "beautiful" and the "sublime": Picturesque scenes were thus neither serene (like the Beautiful) nor awe-inspiring (like the Sublime), but full of variety, curious details and interesting textures [irregularity, asymmetry, and interesting textures] – medieval ruins [in the natural landscape] were quintessentially Picturesque". (Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists – available online at, <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199532940.001.0001>).



*Fig17 / Two men walking back to the village along the Albanian Riviera, Borsh  
source / Metropolis*

to the coastline, the beaches and the ocean become accessible. As we drive along PCH 1 we can experience very different environments, where the relationship between natural and artificial<sup>21</sup> landscape is still balanced and harmonious. The main difference between the Californian Pacific Coast and the Albanian Southern Riviera is the fact that in some parts the Pacific Coast runs at very high levels above the water and the landscape appears more

dramatic, overwhelming, tending towards the sublime; whilst the Albanian southern coastal-strip seems to be characterized by the alternation of sublime panoramic moments - mountains, canyons and waterfalls - and more subtle picturesque views<sup>22</sup> - terraced cultivations, small, sometimes abandoned, villages, ancient ruins of castles and religious buildings, and mimetic bunkers overthrown by wild vegetation. (Fig 13/14)

The sublime landscape of the Big Sur in California and the iconic elements of its landscape, like Bixby Creek Bridge - one of the most photographed bridges along the Pacific Coast - keep inspiring movie directors who seek to confer to landscape a leading role in their films. One of the most recent examples can be found in the HBO Crime drama television series *True Detective* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, Justin Lin, 2014), where several scenes are shot in the sublime and violent nature of uncontaminated landscapes along PCH1. The plot of the Second series is about a bizarre murder that brings together three law-enforcement officers and a career criminal, each of whom must navigate a web of conspiracy and betrayal in the scorched landscapes of California<sup>23</sup>. The sublime landscape serves as a backdrop where the characters are introduced and it contributes to the construction of a "psycho-sphere ambiance"<sup>24</sup>.

The example of PCH1 and the surrounding settlements shows us that, in order to make the area sustainable and attractive to tourists, it's important to provide facilities. For example, even when the beaches are not accessible, it's important to supply alternative activities and structures that adapt and change their offer, guaranteeing the extension of the touristic season to the entire year. In this respect the "Reactive Riviera" project seemed to give a more realistic and convincing answer to the need of improving the urban condition and the use of the touristic areas along the coast, providing concrete answers to the problems and the needs of the Albanian Riviera. Land art objects and iconic images alone cannot activate tourism and boost the economy. While preserving and respecting the natural landscape remains the priority, complementing the evocative contemplation elements with new services and including the existing villages and attractions in sustainable networks, is a promising and farseeing strategy.

### **CONTRASTED environment**

It has come to my attention while researching the above mentioned references for the "Riviera Drive" and watching the movies shot in such locations with greater attention, that they all share a common characteristic: they seem to have a "Dark Side" to them. Why?

In the famous picture directed by Alfred Hitchcock, the French Riviera Drive serves as a backdrop to the thriller: the feeling of danger and thrill is conferred by the "speed" of Grace Kelly's car on the winding road located on the edge of the cliff, along the ridge of the mountains. In the film *Mulholland Drive* the road appears as a dark and dangerous place and it is only shown during nighttime. The total absence of street lighting enhances the sharp headlights of the dark limo, which only show what is in the very proximity of the car and leaves the rest of the landscape in total darkness. This condition contributes to the mystery of the movie and the feeling of incognito and danger. (Fig. 15) Similarly PCH 1 is the backdrop for several thriller movies, probably because it appears as a dark and idyllic setting, at the end of the world, where the landscape is often overwhelming and tends towards the sublime: a dangerous road with low visibility where "bad things happen"<sup>25</sup>.

If we were to seek for an answer to the question why all these drives have a dark feeling to them, it might be traceable in the strong contrast that they establish: in both PCH1 and *Mulholland Drive* the road setting is in contrast with California culture, the colorful world of the movies industry, the fictitious façade of the Hollywood stars. Likewise we could say that the French Riviera Drive offers a substantial contrast: its unpredictable blind curves against the colorful towns along the coast, full of life and frivolous activities.

Speaking of contrast it is interesting to notice that one of the famous car journey paintings by David Hockney is entitled after the road I refer to as dark and spooky, while the painting in question appears as a glorification of color. In the painting *Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio*, Hockney breaks the confinement of the one-point perspective and represents a sequence of familiar landmarks along the winding road (which is flattened to cover the horizontality of the painting's layout), with harmonious forms and joyful colors - which seem to be informed by the color of Matisse, Seurat and Dufy - while the "vast horizontality of this very large work (it is over twenty feet wide) encourages the viewer to obey the verbal noun of the title:

23 / From Series Information. HBO Website. [Online] Available online from: <http://www.hbo.com/true-detective/about/index.html> [Accessed: September 2015].

24 / From: Hibberd, James (May 27, 2014) *True Detective' season 2 scoop: Trio of leads, California setting* - Entertainment Weekly Website. [Online] Available online from: <http://www.ew.com/article/2014/05/27/true-detective-season-2-scoop> [Accessed: September 2015].

25 / Quoting Jason Payne - Professor at UCLA, school of Architecture and Urban Design (LA)

Drive" (MELIA 1995, p.141). (Fig. 16)

Also Albania is a country full of contrasts and this could become a quality that is preserved and valued. Albanians would then stop blindly imitating neighboring and distant countries, and start creating their own identity instead, offering to the world a whole new experience that cannot be found anywhere else and that has its personal and unique identity.

### The FINISH line

The Albanian coastal-strip shares many characteristics with other coastal areas of the Mediterranean, and to some extent, with the California Pacific Coast, but at the same time it retains many peculiarities that make it unique. Therefore the lessons learned elsewhere cannot be directly applied to the Albanian context, but need to be elaborated and adapted to the territory and to its unique landscape conditions. The negative consequences of borrowing planning approaches design strategies and even technologies from near or faraway countries and applying them without any filter, revision and adaptation, appears obvious if we look at cities like Tirana and on how these operations can disrupt the landscape and erase what is left of tradition and cultural heritage.

The future of the Albanian Riviera should be in line with its contrasting and multicultural heritage, even with the clamorous contradictions of its contemporary culture - the country seems "simultaneously 20 years behind and 20 years forward" - where we can find on the same street of the capital city an old man pedaling his improvised vehicle<sup>26</sup> to deliver goods and a line of sluggish cows returning to their stables, riding alongside a young and polished entrepreneur speeding with his awkward Mercedes, while talking on his shiny smart phone; or an old bunker annexed to an improvised informal house,

being swallowed by an agglomeration of curtain walled hotels that seem to be about to dive into the sea. (Fig 17)

If Albanians were indeed to draw inspiration from the resourceful American culture, it should not be to mimic their iconic roads, but rather to draw inspiration from their imagination and their capacity to transform a road that takes you nowhere into a mystic experience; to make a museum out of potatoes ("Idaho Potato Museum", Blackfoot, Idaho), bananas ("International Banana Museum", Mecca, California) or even toilet seats ("Toilet Seat Art Museum" in Texas). The same inventiveness that made Americans see the moon as the ideal open air museum display case (CATUCCI, 2013, p. 105) and allowed them to come up with the idea of creating Museums on the Moon<sup>27</sup>. All the traces left on the moon by the astronauts during the lunar missions are not elements that retrace a history, but rather "objects of self-interest, aesthetic objects" (CATUCCI, 2013, p.107). The traces have become fetishes and maybe someday the sites will become yet another theme park where they can sell us memorabilia of the programmed<sup>28</sup> trace of men on the moon.

If we were to follow this attitude, the task of a designer approaching the Albanian Riviera and its future development, should not be only a traditional mapping of the area, a simple redrawing of the landscape, the infrastructures and the settlements, but rather an investigation that highlights the hidden - apparently unimportant - peculiarities of the environment: like augmented landscape representations where bunkers become elements of the natural landscape; schizoanalytic<sup>29</sup> cartographies of the Riviera, where Time and Space merge and the highlighted temporal contradictions become a characterizing aspect of the Albanian landscape; documentations of the

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26 / In Tirana it is very common to find small self-assembled transportation means made with bicycle or scooter spare parts combined with a container to place materials and goods.

27 / The US government attributes a "unique historic and cultural value" to the first and last NASA expedition to the moon (respectively, Apollo 11 and Apollo 17) and this resulted in the prohibition of future visits to these sites in all their parts. In fact to safeguard the human artifacts left on the moon by the astronauts, NASA defined Exclusion Zones around the sites of the moon landings, tracing a perimeter with a 75 m. ray from the lunar modules left on the moon during the expeditions. These areas are not accessible by machines or people. Ref. CATUCCI, 2013, p. 105.

28 / According to Catucci in his book "Imparare dalla Luna" (English translation: "Learning from the Moon"), the entire moon expedition experience was part of a precise documenting strategy, where organized narration was staging the event before it even happened. Ref. (CATUCCI, 2013, p. 107).

29 / Schizoanalysis (schizo- from Greek *skhizein* meaning 'to split') is a concept created by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari and first expounded in their book *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari explains that "rather than moving in the direction of reductionist modifications which simplify the complex," schizoanalysis "will work towards its complexification, its processual enrichment, towards the consistency of its virtual lines of bifurcation and differentiation, in short towards its ontological heterogeneity." Guattari 1992. *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. Trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995. Trans. of *Chaosmosis*. Paris: Editions Galilée. (P. 61).

30 / See "Every Building on the Sunset Strip", 1966, Edward Ruscha. Self-published book, offset lithograph, 1966.

31 / Ref. Venturi R., Scott Brown D., Izenour S. (1977) *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge: MIT Press.



Fig18 / "Every Building on the Sunset Strip", 1966, Ed Ruscha  
Self-published book, offset lithograph, © Ed Ruscha / source internet

coastal territory through sequential views printed on one single sheet of foldable paper<sup>30</sup>; or exercises of isolation and combination of popular culture elements and unconventional mapping that draw inspiration from the ever-referenced research by Robert Venturi<sup>31</sup>. (Fig 18)

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