Seàn Hillen's *Irelantis*: the second life of parody

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Abstract

Seàn Hillen's 1994-98 series of photomontages, known as Irelantis, are postmodern parodies that recycle mass-media photos of disasters and spur the viewers to address the issue of referentiality as reality is turned into a spectacle. Hillen also parodies tourism photography and the staging of heritage. Irelantis is therefore a critical inquiry into Irishness, the invention of traditions, and the construction of staged authenticity. It echoes the revisionist trend in Irish history and signals the advent of the postnational era.

Introduction

Seàn Hillen was born in 1961 in Northern Ireland, where he was a close observer of the Troubles. After studying art in Belfast, he moved to London, where he attended the Slade School of Arts, then to Dublin, where he is still working. His first collages, focused on Northern Ireland, were received with much unease both in London and Dublin as they addressed sectarian violence straightforwardly and critically. Seeking less radical forms of expression, Hillen subsequently geared his attention towards a much less overtly political theme: Irish cultural identity. His *Irelantis* series, initially stretching from 1994 to 1998, has been acclaimed by art critics and lay viewers alike. The collages have been reproduced countless times and are now part and parcel of Irish popular culture. The tremendous success enjoyed by *Irelantis* is partly due to the humorous hotchpotch of recycled images that collide in this fantasy world. Yet, despite the playfulness of his chucklesome collages, Hillen is no naïve prankster. His recycling process induces neither a loss nor an oversimplification. By including fragments of found photographic materials in his landscapes, the artist recontextualizes these cultural debris so as to reassess the authenticity of images that we take for purely referential. Landing on the shores of Irelantis, one becomes aware that Hillen's collages are parodic transpositions that raise a whole spectrum of questions. The title of Hillen's set of photographic collages, *Irelantis*, obviously refers to Plato's Atlantis, the lost paradise island and the most harmonious of societies. It also epitomizes Hillen's aesthetic commitments. Given the artist's background, his wonderland cannot but be construed as a reassessment of the lost nationalist rural utopia. In form, as well as content, Hillen's recycling technique therefore wavers between the postmodern and the postnationalist.

A postmodern compendium

Parody has often been tagged as the hallmark of our postmodern world, being granted –like folklore, whose second life has received much critical attention—a second life. Margaret A. Rose has provided a minute investigation into the parodistic in postmodern theory (Rose, 1993, 212-20) and contended that postmodern parody was reflexive (Rose, 1979, 65) while Irish playwright and critic David Brett has argued that as regionalism is challenged and national traditions undermined, "the material culture we are ourselves secreting is profoundly parodic" (Brett, 20). Hillen's parodic collage technique emblematizes artistic postmodernism

in that it consistently abolishes territorial boundaries, chronological linearity, and stylistic hierarchies.

If, for the proponents of a disrespectful modernity, the collage was a means of discarding academic conventions of all kinds, for those who, like Seàn Hillen, work in the wake of Pop art, the collage is first and foremost a means of rooting their works into mass culture and popular entertainment. Deconstructing second-hand images is no longer synonymous with rejecting norms but with recycling things known to everyone, hence the viewers' sense of *déjà-vu*. Commenting upon his own works, Hillen says: "They're this thing that you've never seen before, but at the same time they're extremely familiar. It feels like a world that you know but you've never been to; they've got that vividness of a dream" (McKeith).

Hillen's humorous works integrate photographic images from various sources but all of them widely circulated and popular. He scorns art images and elite culture to enhance mechanically reproduced images seemingly deprived of aesthetic aura, whether it be postcards or journalistic photographs. The postcards Hillen collected, many of them featuring icons of the tourism industry, were first sent to RTE for game shows or televised quiz, which connects these visual objects to the world of mass entertainment and TV. The artist prides himself on this popular dimension, which shows his earnest interest in pop culture and kitsch. Hillen also borrows from a lavish Catholic imagery: cheap icons of the Virgin Mary appear in several futuristic scenes to remind the viewers of Ireland's anachronistic attachment to its religious identity.

To viewers with a primarily visual knowledge of the world, and one that is derived from television or magazines, *Irelantis* efficiently encapsulates the visual logorrhea of the mass-media. As Grenblatt stated, "mobile photographers and touring photographic reproductions visualised and mobilised the globe by putting it on spectacular display. With Capitalism's arrangement of the world as a "department store" "the proliferation and circulation of representations … achieved a spectacular and virtually inescapable global magnitude" (Grenblatt, 6). The viewers are spellbound by the collection of bright, even garish images in Hillen's compositions: Irish romantic landscapes, world-famous beauty-spots, cataclysms of all kinds, space crafts and stations, satellite images, and people in gaudy clothes rambling around this incredible wonderland. Very much like our representation-saturated societies, *Irelantis* is fraught with signs accumulated obsessively, dislocated, and contradictory at times. In this respect, the collage is undoubtedly the most material embodiment of postmodern aesthetics as it discards all sense of hierarchy, with the juxtaposition of various second-hand images mimicking capitalist accumulation, its display of commodities, and the commercial exuberance of our epoch. "The postmodern 'condition' is collagelike", Thomas Brockelman claims (Brockelman, 184). Hillen's appropriations from the mainstream media are never satirical: *Irelantis* is on the side of parody indeed, and hypertextuality [1]. These second-hand debris of our leisure society are pasted into multi-layered landscapes and thereby given a new meaning.

As a matter of fact, through his recomposed sites, Hillen calls into question our perception of space and identity in a globalized culture. His eclectic montages do not reflect the disunified, exploded modern world that Adorno identified in his *Théorie esthétique*. They are, conversely, the by-products of a unified, flattened out, glocal world. The viewer thenceforth finds himself in a delocalized reality, where the former components of his identity are blended in a cultural

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[1] See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes*, Seuil, Paris 1982.

hybrid. Colin Graham, a specialist in culture theory, states that life is now "negotiated on the borderlines of a new, hybridized, performative, migrant and marginalized identities" (Graham, vii). He also mentions "the cacophony of Irish culture," something that is evidenced by Hillen's choice of technique and subject-matter.

At first glance, *Irelantis* is a medley of tourist spots. *The Temple of Hatshepsut at Powerscourt, Bangor, Co. Dublin*[1] (ill. 1), juxtaposes two famous heritage sites referred to in the title –itself a textual collage if not a parody. It illustrates the overlaying of several cultures that springs from our knowledge, however shallow it may be, of all the world's landscapes. Today's TV viewers are used to seeing successive landscapes; flying from one place to another within a matter of hours has enabled travelers to superimpose their geographical experiences. Geographer Relph argued that the mass media created "placelessness", and that "the purpose of travel is less to experience unique and different places than to collect those places (especially on film)" (Relph, 85). A telling symptom of contemporary placelessness, Hillen's collage erases all cultural differences between the two places thereby creating a new hybrid territory that is related to no particular identity or history. Hillen's parodic postcards also show the multi-layered perception of the landscape and the impact of the media-gaze upon people's experience of the landscape:

> Contemporary sightseers, when walking and driving in foreign asphalt worlds, are constantly folded into a 'multimediascape' of books, magazines, paintings, postcards, ads, soap operas, movies, video games and music. "Markers" of tourism seem to be everywhere these days, where the "tourist gaze" and "media gaze" highly overlap and reinforce each other, whether people travel corporeally or simply imaginatively through the incredible amount of global images that make up our everyday media cultures. "Imaginative geographies" have material consequences, and thereby undermine the distinction between the real and the perceived. They constantly produce remarkable buildings, views, photographs and places. Photographs do not only make places visible, performable and memorable; places are also sculptured materially as simulations of idealized photographs: 'postcard places' (Larsen, 246).

Not only do Hillen's works delocalize our experience of the landscape, they also dehistoricize cultural sites. In *Horseracing in front of the Ruins of St. Stephen's Green*, he propels the viewer into the future, and into an unlikely mountainscape. Dublin's famous shopping mall has fallen into ruins, now resembling the Coliseum, while a snow-capped volcano threatens the devastated city. People seem to run away in the face of the disaster while the race horses, no longer running for a prize, run for their lives. Hillen revisits both the 18th century genre of ruins painting and the much later cinematographic genre of the disaster movie. Most of the reconstructed settings in *Irelantis* are both exotic and familiar, strange and hackneyed. Like all parodic works, the collages refer to well-known, easily recognizable objects but disrupt the inner consistency of the original form in order to subvert the genre itself. Discrepancy and incongruity are the main vehicles of parody (Rose, 1979, 82) and aptly characterize Hillen's anachronistic collages. *The Oracle at O'Connell St. Bridge* similarly illustrates the visual compendium bred by the mass media and the tourism industry. Irish, Greek and American architectures are juxtaposed and plunge the viewer, also a visitor-by-proxy, into three different epochs of history. A couple of disproportionate glass buildings, standing out against an orangey sky, tower above today's Dublin, with its rows of four-storied brick buildings, while the ruins of an ancient temple have disrespectfully replaced O'Connell's column. Dublin is therefore invaded both by the past and the future. In many compositions, Hillen juxtaposes images of traditional villages and symbols of modernity derived from science-fiction movies or leisure parks. In *The Monorail and Submarine at Enniscorthy*, a 1960s' futuristic tramway is pasted into an old Irish town, next to a medieval stone bridge. In *The Launch Pad at*

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[1] All the works referred to in this paper can be seen on Seàn Hillen's website www.irelantis.com.

O'Connell Street, a space rocket towers above an avenue, next to the good old green Dublin buses. In the years preceding *Irelantis*, the artist had devoted many of his works to Gagarin and the Russian space odyssey. Several scenes in *Irelantis* also feature fragments of the space conquest so that Ireland is turned into a chronological maelstrom. Looking at Hillen's chronological fantasies, one cannot but recall Baudrillard's words in *Simulacra and Simulation*: "today one has the impression that history has retreated, leaving behind it an indifferent nebula, traversed by currents, but emptied of references" (Baudrillard, 43-44). To blur chronology further, Hillen recycles old images of the future. In *Irelantis*, time thenceforth becomes as meaningless and irrelevant as national territories. In this respect, and to a certain extent, the success enjoyed by Hillen's works might reveal the postmodern yearning for the past –including former visions of the future –that Baudrillard traced back.

If Hillen's works borrow from the mass media and science fiction, leveling down all differences between art and entertainment, they also combine references to the Fine Arts, as well as obvious borrowings from postcard photography and its kitsch aesthetics. Hillen knowingly negates all differences between high and lower art forms. Many collages hint at the picturesque tradition, or the Sublime in XVIIIth century landscape painting. *The Great Pyramids of Carlingford Lough* is reminiscent of watercolours made in the Lake District or Killarney. The presence of the visitor beholding the scenery reinforces the parallelism with picturesque landscapes. In the 18th century, painters were indeed advised to insert figures in the landscape to help the viewers grasp the sublimity of nature. In many postcards, such figures are also "points of identification for the gaze" (Kiang, 24). Yet, in Hillen's collage, the presence of the pyramids, as well as the boundary of the earth floating in outer space force the viewer to look twice at this unreal, yet life-like, landscape. Each fragment of the composition is familiar but the assemblage of those visual fragments sounds staggeringly strange. *An Expedition Discovers Joyce's Tower*, a work that will be discussed in greater details subsequently, parodies Gericault's *The Raft of Medusa*, with the stark contrasts in the sky and the ominous blackness of the clouds imitating the romantic representations of tempest scenes. Hillen's idiosyncratic wonderland is humorous but thought-provoking at the same time because it questions our relationship with representations and images as well as our blind faith in photography. As a matter of fact, in *Irelantis*, photography does not duplicate reality but turns the unreal into hyperreality so that the medium's ontological function itself is subverted.

Virtual reality and real virtuality

A clear-sighted critic of our world, Hillen delves into a treasure trove of popular but truncated depictions that shape our perception of the real. If Hillen's makeshift collages cannot be mistaken for authentic reality, they nonetheless engage with the issues of authenticity and hyperreality. In *Irelantis*, these notions are bound to two photographic traditions, one being the photographic postcard that accompanied the development of mass tourism in Ireland in the 1960s, the other photojournalism. The latter is alluded to in many works showing natural disasters, crowds of people fleeing devastated cities, or unidentified smokes that pose a threat to the inhabitants' well-being.

In spite of its alluring, garish colors, *Irelantis* is deeply dystopic, even though the dystopia is parodic. Many collages incorporate press cuttings representing images of natural disasters which bring to mind the disappearance of Plato's Atlantis. Landing in Irelantis, we may laugh at the series of catastrophes that hit Irish cities: volcano eruptions, tidal waves, snowstorms or

avalanches. These scenes remind the viewers of images that are flung to them via their television screens, henceforth enabling them to live those events by proxy. In *The Great Eruption viewed from the Liffey*, two sightseers just off their yellow car are beholding the eruption of a volcano and the whirlpools it provokes in the Liffey. They do not show any sign of panic but stand, undaunted, by the river side enjoying the spectacle of the disaster. In many works, the presence of viewers eyeing the catastrophes signals the advent of Debord's society of the spectacle and exemplifes Susan Sontag's claim that photography, ubiquitous as it is, has turned reality into a spectacle (Sontag, 110). In Irelantis, the cataclysms, and the heritage alike, are staged in an endless process of 'leisurification'.

However, contrary to mass-media image-makers, who conceal the making-up process and lure the viewers into taking the faithfulness of images for granted, Hillen lays the manipulations bare. The incompatibility of the assembled elements, the inconsistency of both framing and lighting, the differences in color intensity within the images, the uneven margins of the collages, and the repetition of the motifs all betray the artist's parodic stance. By subverting photography itself and engaging into a reflexive criticism, Hillen discloses the widespread habit of mistaking a sign for its referent. Because the sundry visual signs that make up the works are taken out of their original context, they are subsumed into mere signs, stripped of their referential values. The same drift underpins mass-media culture but fails to be detected. Umberto Eco noted that nowadays "the sign aims to be the thing, to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement" (Eco, 7). The demise of reality is correlated to the triumph of the sign, in the same way as the depletion of discourse is connected to the overwhelming invasion of images. The representations of natural disasters in the media make these phenomena both real and unreal, in other words, hyperreal. As Castells puts it, the world media picture is the work of make believe: the media have transformed virtual reality into real virtuality, ending the separation between information and entertainment[1] (Castells, 375). Science-fiction movies, which are also parodied by the artist, copy these images extensively using technologies prone to breed hyperreal worlds. Paradoxically then, the mass-media de-realize reality.

Hillen's works may heighten the viewers' awareness of the inauthenticity of photographic and cinematographic 'reproductions' but they also bring the de-realizing process a step further. *Irelantis* blurs the distinction between the original and its reproduction by constructing a faked reality thanks to real simulations. The artist uses photography not as a proof of what has actually happened but as a simulacrum, something that looks real but isn't. A postmodern avatar of the Greek utopia, *Irelantis* is a parodic simulation. "Simulation, Baudrillard writes, threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false", the "real" and the "imaginary"" (Baudrillard, 3). In Hillen's works, the mixture of real touched-up photographs, authentic faked postcards, and fictitious yet life-life images cannot but bring the spectator to forsake his Platonic dualist vision. Yet, since, as Jean Baudrillard posited, "the medium and the real are now in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable" (Baudrillard 83), the unreal is thought of as real because we no longer perceive the distinction between the message and the medium[2].

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[1] "It is a [communicative] system in which reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the work of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience" (Castells, 375).

[2] "We are no longer in the society of the spectacle (…). The medium itself is no longer identifiable as such, and the confusion of the medium and the message (McLuhan) is the first great formula of this era" (Baudrillard, 30).

Daniel J. Boorstin's seminal reflection on hyperrealism and reality was elaborated against the backdrop of the American consumer society. His argument that, in the age of contrivance, the forged, or simulated reality may be perceived as more real than the reality is premised on the idea that simulations respond to our need to transcend the mundane reality of our lives. Hillen's many protagonists, not all of them dummies but greedy voyeurs with a taste for the spectacular, are image-thirsty even though the images they are fed on are faked. Living in a country that kept celebrating Irishness and offered few opportunities of multicultural hybridization, Hillen's admirers delight in this imaginary globalized Ireland. Boorstin's concept of pseudo-events can be applied to Hillen's pseudo(land)scapes: counterfeited landscapes that deliver as much pleasure as the real ones and provide the consumers with a heightened form of experience. However, if the American social historian lamented the vulgarization of high culture, Hillen delves into pop culture with no attempt at exposing the dangers of mass culture. What he openly mocks is rather the Irish's uneasiness with the staging of their Irishness and their struggle to connect global and local cultural artefacts. The conceptual grids that helped grasp the impact of the mass-media upon our perception of the real may also contribute to understanding the staging of national identity in Ireland. As a matter of fact, the very falsehood that permeates global mass-media also underlies the construction of Irish heritage and identity through truncated photographs widely diffused by the tourist authorities in the 1950s.

The staging of Irishness: setting identity

As previously demonstrated, Hillen's collages and reclying method pertain to the tradition of parody. For a parody to be efficient, it must explicitly refer to a genre but subvert some of its features. Moreover, though never as scathing as satire, parody may conceal political judgments. *Irelantis* is fraught with references to contemporary, popular genres but alludes more specifically to technical devices used in tourist photography. Hillen has indeed created a new genre: the mock-touristic. The size of the works and the subject-matters are unmistakably those of postcards. Hillen even quotes, one might even be tempted to say pastiches, John Hinde visually.

By opting for a postcard format, the artist invites the viewer to construe his works in the light of the tourism industry, an industry well-versed in the art of staging. John Urry has convincingly spelled out the correlation between tourism and photography: he dates the 'birth' of the "tourist gaze" to the same year as the invention of photography. "Tourism and photography came to be welded together and the development of each cannot be separated from the other" (Urry, 148-149). Photography has helped constructing sightseeing and has keyed tourism to gazing: "the objects and technologies of cameras and films have constituted the very nature of travel, as sites turn into sights, they have constructed what is worth going to 'sightsee' and what images and memories should be brought back" (Urry, 129). All experiences were "democratised" through their translation into inexpensive photographic images (Sontag 1977: 7). "This is a society where participating in events becomes tantamount to seeing and capturing them as spectacular 'imagescapes'" (Larsen, 243). Because Hillen's main source of images is a form of photography that fakes reality unnoticed, his collages question the referentiality of photography as well as the authenticity of the representations of Irishness. Tourism in Ireland is evoked either through the presence of world-famous Irish brandnames, through the boating tourists in *Boating on the Liffey*, or through the swimming

pool and hotel in *The Birthpace of Aphrodite*. Ireland's most visited places are in the pictures: the mounds and standing stones of Newgrange's prehistoric site, the listed historical buildings of Powerscourt or Johnstown Castle, natural wonders such as the Cliffs of Moher, the Wicklow mountains, and the lakes, but also Temple Bar and O'Connell Bridge, Dublin's tourist highlights. Hillen's collages cover the whole range of photographic cards, whether they be scenic postcards, views of natural sites, historic and archaeological buildings, or street scenes that equally appeals to the tourists. He is fully aware of the power of images: "The "tourist gaze" suggests that tourist places are produced and consumed through images and representational technologies, and that gazing is constructed through and involves the collection of signs" (Larsen, 246).

The commodification of nature and culture by the tourism industry and the advent of the culture industry, which Hillen exposes, have been the starting points of many postmodern representation theories. Umberto Eco's notion of the fake authentic, as well as Jean Baudrillard's analysis of hyperreality, are instanced by Disneyland and the leisure industry. Ploughing the same furrow, Hillen explores the side-effects of mass tourism. Not only does he revisit the paraphernalia of travel and tourist photography, he also reproduces its aesthetic idiom: garish colours, minutely staged characters, and romanticized sceneries. In order to parody the tourism photographers of the 1960s, who used Technicolor photography to create tourist utopias, Hillen resorts to brash light and saturated colors. The bright blue sea in *The Great Harbour and Clogher Head*; the gaudy clothes of the sight-seers; the stark contrasts in light that make the sites more appealing; or the touched up colours in *The Launch Pad at O'Connell Street,* all clearly refer to the embellishment of tourist spots in postcards. The evenly lit elements in the postcards that Hillen recycles smack of falsification: the shadows are too short and the sources of light inconsistent. In *The Colosseum of Cork,* for instance, Hillen uses elements that betray the distortions operated in tourist photography: the red sunset, the dark vegetation framing the scene, the bright greenery in which the ruins are nestled. The staging of the ruins as well as the improbable presence of two tamed dolphins, most probably –or improbably –performing in a leisure-park show, exemplify the merging of culture, the tourism industry and leisure. Because part of Hillen's collage is a reference to a postcard printed by the John Hinde Studios of Blarney Castle, the artist could intend to warn his fellow-countrymen of the dangers of tourism over-development.

Hillen collected many postcards published by John Hinde's studio. Hinde was the pioneer of Technicolour photography and is known for his postcards of rural Ireland, as well as for his photographs of the Butlin holiday resorts. The rise in mass tourism that followed WWII triggered a demand for colour photographs at a time when technical innovations made them cheaper: "the modern world's lust for visuality and geographical movement accelerated tremendously with these inventions [namely travel and photography]; by working together they caused a profound multiplication of images and sights, an unprecedented geographical extension of the field of the visible" (Larsen, 241). Profiting by this trend, Hinde became a pioneer of color photography; he is equally known for his use of the Bowen flashlights. In Hillen's *Collecting Meteorites at Knowth*, the two red-haired children were initially snapped by Hinde's collaborators. Hinde's postcards were touched-up images of a primitive Ireland that appealed to visitors from industrialized countries: "Hinde's images presented an idealized Ireland, one that tourists inevitably wanted to remember" (Zuelow, 210). Hinde's photographers constructed the Irish landscape, introduced objects recreating an Irish folklore, added flowers, and would see to it that the models were carefully dressed. Much in the same

way, in *Ireland of the Welcomes*, a tourist magazine thriving in the 1960s and 70s, the stories were conceived so as to meet the demands of an external gaze. Even before tourism became a matter of national interest in Ireland, Robert J. Flaherty's 1934 pseudo-documentary, *Man of Aran*, also contributed to the reconstruction of Irish folklore and the popularization of an Irish fakelore. Through his references and quotes, Hillen therefore revisits the history of the construction of Irishness, the commodification of national heritage, and questions the authenticity of folklore. By replacing turf by meteorites and setting the two children in a landscape made up of prehistoric mounds and egg-shaped space stations, Hillen shows that all images, even those who are supposedly praising Irish authentic traditions, are mere compositions. To an enlightened viewer, Hillen's anachronistic collage is not more faked than a postcard by Hinde. Hillen also reaches into the Butlin photographs repertoire. John Hinde was commissioned a series of photographic cards advertising the famous English resorts and leisure parks. The monorail in *The Monorail and Submarine at Enniscorthy*, or the brightly-dressed tourists are reminiscent of Hinde's artificial overexposed overcolorized shots. Hillen's colorful *Irelantis* is a parody of Hinde's tourism utopias.

Technically speaking, photo retouching, as well as the utilization of light for creating "atmospheres" –as defined by German philosopher Gernot Böhme –mimic the beautification of historical sites for tourist consumption. Sparkling with garish colours, Hillen's wonderland is also the symptom of what Böhme calls the aesthetic value, and the ensuing emphasis on staging and displaying: because our economies are based on desires and premised on images as objects of imaginary investment, the staging of commodities, places, or personalities would be keyed to the actual theatricalisation of our societies (Böhme, 172). Now, in *Irelantis*, the consumers' desires and pleasures are heightened by the light atmospheres and the staging of their environments; the colours are appealing and exciting, as if they sprang from our aesthetic drives. Postcards are meant to trigger desire as "the tourism industry invests enormously in photographic images to choreograph desirable "place myths", desiring bodies and photogenic places" (Larsen, 241). Tourism photography created what ethnologist Orvar Löfgren calls "vacationscapes": "simultaneously moving in physical terrain and in fantasylands or mediaworlds, we create vacationscapes" (Löfgren, 2). Hillen's mock-touristic collages, or *bricolages*, debunk the visual rhetoric of tourism photography and its emphasis on both desire and authenticity.

 'Authenticity' itself is an elusive construct. It has become a determinant of tourist satisfaction, with the word "authenticity" being now at the core of conservation policies[1]. The premise underlying these declarations is that folklore and local knowledge are authentic, which needs questioning. Folklore and so-called authentic traditions are often reconstructed or imagined by tourist authorities and local communities. In Ireland, cities enlivened in order to boost the tourism industry are considered as authentic by the visitors even if the overdone colorfulness conceals their true history. Even ecomuseums are no guarantee of authenticity

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[1] Authenticity, considered in this way and affirmed in the Charter of Venice, appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values attached to heritage. The understanding of authenticity plays a key role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration policies, as well as in the World Heritage Convention and other cultural heritage frameworks. Several international guidelines for cultural tourism (such as the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity or the declaration of the International Council of Monuments and Sites written under the aegis of UNESCO) address authenticity and thruthfulness.

though they often pass off as truthful recreations of the past[1]. Tourists desperate to encounter the real Other easily lend credence to the illusion of the authentic Ireland and its fetishized fakelore. Postcards often display the phrase "Real Ireland". As David Roberts noted "the production of illusion through (commercial) display and staging in relation to people and things goes together with the cultivation of an aesthetic attitude in the context of urban capitalist commodity culture" (Roberts, 85). Hillen's technique, which is critically accumulative, and subject-matter expose this process.

Ireland has long been a magnet for tourists. The representation of the Irish landscape and culture that was constructed for tourist consumption has not changed much since the mid-twentieth century (Zuelow, 193). Killarney has always been romanticized in postcards which featured couples boating on the lakes so that the viewers recognize the tourists featured in Hillen's montages immediately. The development of mass tourism in Ireland after the Civil War entailed the transformation of landscapes and townscapes, as well as the creation of new "traditions" or fakelore. Back in the 1940s, when tourism became of national interest, Ireland was Irishized and exotified even before MacCannell came up with the concept of "staged authenticity". The sense of otherness sought after by the tourists was, and is still rooted in the promotion of a rural Ireland peopled by friendly, red-haired peasants and freckled children in Aran sweaters. The cliché of unspoilt rurality has been compounded by a whole range of visual representations. Publishing houses such as Valentine's of Dublin and Dundee produced series of postcards featuring typical Irish folkscenes, mountain farms, cabins, and hilly landscapes, generating "an impenetrable flat aesthetic" (Kiang, 24). However, these settings are cultural constructs: the Irish landscape has been fashioned so as to meet the expectations of the tourists. As Zuelow demonstrates, the ITA (Irish Tourist Association) and the later statutory tourist boards devoted considerable energy to redefining Irish scenery and sometimes altered whole ecosystems to meet tourist desires. MacCannell seminally considered that in the eyes of our contemporaries, authenticity is to be sought elsewhere, in other time periods, other cultures having preserved a simple and pure way of life. Ireland turned its rural backwardness into an enticing rural ideal appealing to tourists with a taste for authentic country life. The backwardness of Ireland was thence be turned into an asset once properly staged[2]. Eric Zuelow points out the "continued Irishization of Irish spaces" that followed from the steady increase in tourism (Zuelow 201). The aestheticization of the landscape and the transmogrification of rural places into colourful Ruritanias displaying their brightly painted houses, and carefully restored thatched cottages have helped conceal the bare reality of rural poverty[3]. In other words, simulation went along with dissimulation. Violence and conflicts were equally overlooked (Zuelow, 142). Because it is visually grounded in old tourist photography, Hillen's work is therefore also a critical investigation into Ireland's image-building. The artist purposefully selects objects or places that have long emblematized

[1] In Muckross House, Killarney, traditional farms have been recreated, actors embody farmers, bake bread or light turf fires. This reassuring rural exoticism is a simulation of reality that has much in common with the Old Bethpage Village that Umberto Eco describes in his Travels into Hyperreality (Eco, 11).

[2] From 1958 onwards, the Tidy Towns and Villages competition made Irish villages neater and more colourful. These contests entailed a precise idea of what Irish villages should display: simple, bright and coloured narrow streets, slated roofs, cottages nestled in greener, and the warm, welcoming pub.

[3] In a 1894 novel entitled *The Prisoner of Zenda*, German writer Anthony Hope Hawkins coined the imaginary country of Ruritania. The film made after the novel show a romantic an idealized rural setting that epitomizes the nationalist pastoral ideal.

Ireland. In *The Great Falls of Carlingford Lough*, Hillen has pasted a colourful carriage into a cosmopolitan tourist utopia. Horse-drawn carriages are associated with Irish folklore and travellers. In the West of Ireland and on the Aran Islands, the visitors taken on carriage tours feel they discover an exotic, timeless place that is marketed as an authentic experience.

Hillen's collages expose the symbiosis of tourism and heritage in Ireland. After WWII, the Cultural Relations Committee in Ireland undertook a cultural propaganda that was shaped by tourism interests. Today, culture and the culture industry are known to be enmeshed; the tourism industry has had a leading role in framing cultural policy, so that national history has been reduced to heritage experiences and packaged for tourists. "It is as much like going to Disneyland as it is visiting an historic site" (Zuelow, 166). History has to be enjoyable, easy to consume, and playfully staged. The visual sparkle of Irelantis echoes the staging of heritage. In *Ecstatic Nuns outside the Casino at Powerscourt* some elements have been exaggeratedly brightened up while palm trees add to the exotification of the historical building. The tourists are gazing at a group of ranting nuns enclosed by coloured rails. By systematically inserting characters in his collages, Hillen defines the landscape as a pleasure place to be consumed. Likewise, view postcards systematically include figures to suggest that the scenery is at the disposal of the tourists.

Aware of the environmental threat posed by mass tourism, Hillen also denounces the rampant urbanization of natural spaces in the name of tourism. In *The Great Cliffs of College Green*, the neoclassical buildings of Dublin University are overlooking the vertiginous cliffs. Roads and alleyways enable the viewers to get very close to the cliffs but spoil the site. Other collages feature large car-parks facilitating the access to Ireland's main natural wonders. The rural-urban dichotomy is particularly salient in *Irelantis*. The city is not consistently depicted as a dystopia; it is primarily equated with a cultural construct, a hybrid environment where traces of distant times or places are amalgamated into a bewildering glocality. In Irelantis, Ireland, considered as culturally homogeneous for a long time, is transmogrified by foreign influences. Irishness falls apart.

Mise-en-abymes

The presence of onlookers in many of Hillen's montages and the ensuing *mise-en-abyme* of the gaze is a device that requires further analysis as it has to do with the reflexivity that Margaret A. Rose identified as a major component of parody. By denouncing the falsehood of fakelore, Hillen deals a blow at Irishness. In *Deconstructing Ireland*, Colin Graham's core contention is that Ireland has often been "a 'cited', quoted version of itself which is both excessive and phantasmal" (Graham, ix). Ireland is now a country that "stages its own reconstruction" (Graham, x). In this respect, Hillen's collages testify to the emergence of postnationalism in Ireland.

"The Quiet Man" Cottage in Meeting House Square, Temple Bar, includes contemporary Irish people as well as two older characters in yellow shirts, who are just out of the thatched cottage. We gaze at young Dubliners watching the two characters walking on the alleyway. The shadowy foreground, as well as the grey alleyway, turn the thatched cottage into a backcloth on a stage. The artificiality of what has become the very hallmark of Irish identity, namely the thatched cottage, is therefore minutely constructed. Hillen's title refers to *The Quiet Man*, shot by John Ford in the early 1950s, one of the films that nourished the stereotype of the Irishman as a western peasant, happy to live a rustic, simple life.

Overlooking the predicament of the peasants in the congested districts at the time, the film created an agrarian utopia that matched the nationalist agenda of President de Valera. In Hillen's collage the cottage, set amidst the modern buildings that now compose Temple Bar, is an invitation to reconsider the idealized backwardness of Ireland that still attracts hordes of tourists. Hillen's work may indeed exemplify MacCannell's observation that "tourism is (...) also an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs (MacCannell, 1). What Hillen explores here is the conflict between culture as a resource for social meaning and a source of profit for the heritage industry. *The Quiet Man" Cottage in Meeting House Square, Temple Bar* examines the impact and recycling of stereotyped identities. What Hillen's works really hint at is the power of imagineering in the construction and transmission of identity.

As a matter of fact, folklore and traditions are to be envisioned as cultural and commercial elements, but also as a patriotic components of identity. In a glocalized culture, the relevance of tradition is bound to be questioned. Jacob Golomb argued that authenticity is disintegrated by postmodernity, that multinational markets are at odds with authenticity as authenticity is reliant on the existence of the nation (Golomb, 205). His definition of authenticity, "authenticity is the loyalty of one's self to its own past, heritage and ethos" (Golomb, 117), stresses continuity and transmission, two notions that are embedded in Hillen's montage technique. The doubly inauthentic postcards conceived by Hillen echo a new outlook on nationalism in Ireland. Irish scholars Diarmuid O'Giollàin and David Brett have showed that folklore is part and parcel of our postmodern world. Cultural identities are recycled endlessly: "Overtime, competing practices and memories are woven into the fabric of national identities. Newer, more useful memories or images replace older ones, while conflicting versions of the national mythologies are debated and discussed. Nations are always in process, always changing" (Zuelow, Xxxx). The collage, and the *mise-en abyme,* materialize the superposition of past and present identities. As Irish revisionist history has helped the population reassess their identity, "Hillen is not alone, and it is now possible to identify a particular kind of amused skepticism, or a general tendency to celebrate rather than mourn the decades of official misrepresentation in the name of national identity" (Connolly, 10). This could explain why Hillen's collages are parodistic rather than satirical: though he is aware of the truncated staging of Irishness, the artist clings to debris that are cherished in spite of their inauthenticity. The reference to tourism photography and the tourism industry, far from circumscribing the debate to an identity constructed for the others, is relevant to the writing of national history: "tourism quite naturally prompts discussion about the nature of national identity" (Zuelow, xxx). In so far as places of cultural significance represent a source of identity for communities, the commodification of the landscape has a bearing upon identities. Interestingly enough, Hillen's works prolong and evidence Irish people's critical insight in their handling of Irishness. Hillen's artistic undertaking therefore backs up Eric Zuelow's main contention that "in many ways, the development of the tourist industry was a significant triumph for the Irish people, who created their own identity and offered it to the world largely on their own terms. This is not the story of a people locked in a postcolonial prison as some suggest; it is the story of a nation actively involved in creating its own past, present, and future" (Zuelow, 238). But the task may prove strenuous.

Hillen's works show a country at grips with many contradictions, torn between its deep-rooted rurality and the success of the Celtic Tiger, the reinvention of traditions and the hegemony of American culture. In *Irelantis*, Irish Ireland is always on the cusp of being engulfed by the

culture of the mass media and the repletion of signs accumulated in our postmodern culture. *An expedition discovers Joyce's Tower at Sandycove* illustrates the complex interplay of influences that challenge Irish culture. This postmodern and postnationalist reinterpretation is also a tribute to Joyce's complex quest and the unfathomable combination of utopia and dystopia in Irish culture. Interestingly, Ireland has repeatedly been considered as a liminal place, one "underwritten by a utopian trope which propels its completion always into the future." (Graham, xii).

Conclusion

The self-reflexive irony at the core of Irelantis is in keeping with a literary tradition spelled out by Colin Graham. The latter delves into the utopian dimension of Ignatius Donnelly's 1882 novel, *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World*, in which the author argues that Irish culture is full of signs which connect with the common Atlantean root. He tries to persuade his readers that Ireland is a fragmented remnant of Atlantis. Hillen's Irelantis, like Donnelly's utopia, is a place that challenges both synchronicity and diachronicity. "Irelantis is, of course, globalised Ireland. (…) But this Ireland is also everywhere and nowhere. Hillen is dealing with displacement in a world where all borders –political, cultural and psychological –are permeable" (O'Toole, 5). This leads us back to Donnelly's displaced Atlantis but also to John Mitchels' imaginary floating Ireland in his *Jail Journal*, published in 1918. In several collages indeed, the sites are located on unidentified planets, being both anchored in the Irish scenery and phantasmatically uprooted. Given the popular success of *Irelantis*, we may conjecture that the Irish have unreservedly recognized Irelantis as an atavistic cultural form. Irelantis reflects the fundamental hybridity of Irish identity and culture. "Irish culture, at once western and colonized, white and racially other, imperial and subjugated, became marginal in the sense of existing at the edge of but within two experiences, with a culture that epitomizes the hybridity, imitation and irony latent in colonial interchanges" (Graham, 141). The hybridity in Hillen's collages is nonetheless generated by postmodernity and globalization more than by Ireland's colonial history. It foreshadows a new transnational age likely to breed unexpected encounters and a reading of Irish cultural history freed of colonial bias. Recycling in *Irelantis* therefore leads to a new hermeneutics in cultural history.

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Biography

Valérie Morisson is a lecturer at Dijon University. Her dissertation, focused on Irish contemporary art, explored the relation between art and the construction of national identity and demonstrated that many artists challenge the Irishness of Irish visual culture. She has written several articles on Irish contemporary artists (Dorothy Cross, Victor Sloan, Willie Doherty for instance), as well as on visual depictions of Irishness and Irish history.