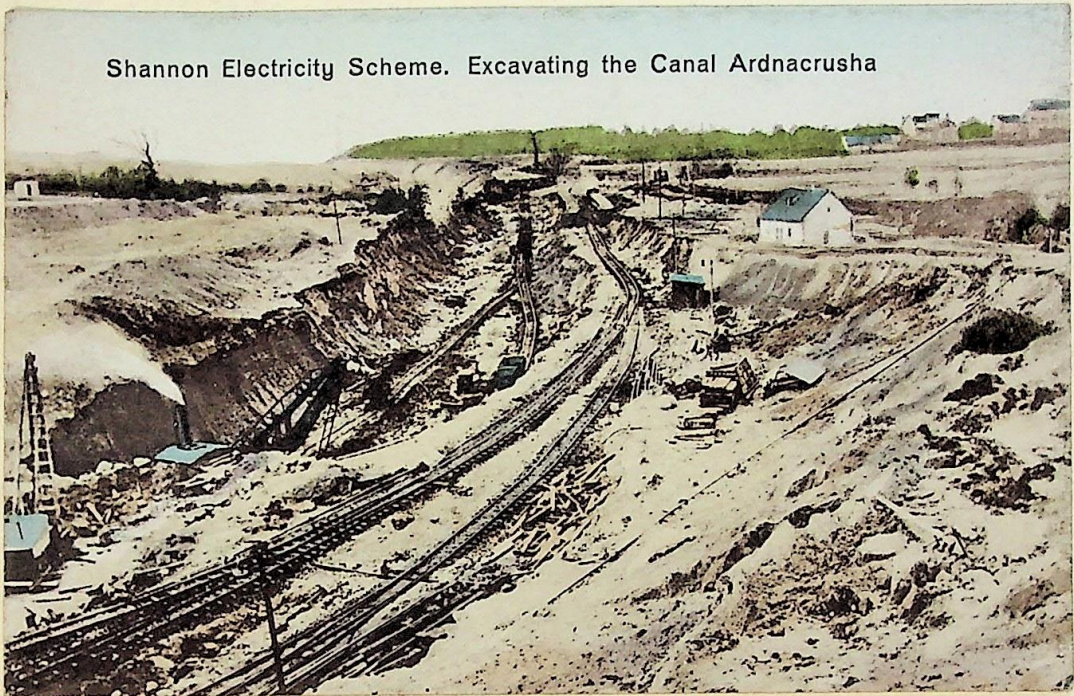


Gerald Bruce  
Paintings

Shannon Electricity Scheme. Excavating the Canal Ardnacrusha





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MOOSSS3INC

Photography and Economic change in Ireland - a History

GERALD BRUEN

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FINE ARTS

B.A. DEGREE COURSE

FINAL YEAR THESIS

APRIL, 1990



## THE SHANNON SCHEME

Oh, were I Homer, that ancient roamer  
I'd write a poem on a noble theme  
To sing the story and praise the glory  
Of that wondrous project the Shannon Scheme

### II

In Ballyvalley, midst oak and sally  
I sat me down and I dreamed a dream  
Of more employment and more enjoyment  
And happier homes through the Shannon Scheme

### III

T'will light our houses, t'will stitch our blouses  
T'will milk our cows and t'will churn the cream  
T'will plough and sow Sir, t'will reap and mow Sir  
T'will raise our dough, Sir, the Shannon Scheme

### IV

On boats and barges as wide and large as  
The Grecian Argus that ship of fame  
From famed Portroe Sir and Killaloe Sir  
The slates will come by the Shannon Scheme

### V

Then fill your glasses, my lads and lasses  
All creeds and classes of the Irish name  
And toast the Statesmen  
Those wide and great men  
Who boldly tackled the Shannon Scheme.

Syl. Boland, 1927



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Jim Callan of the E.S.B. for permission to use the Library and to photocopy extracts from books, pamphlets and other material.



The main body of the thesis is divided into two parts with the Introduction serving to outline some of the methods that have been used to relate photographic media with economic change.

The first part does not address Ireland as its context. Instead I will focus on European reactions to the new cultural and economic dominance of America after the First World War. Epitomized by Fordism and a new level of scientific production management, 'Americanism' held a fascination for many left wing European intellectuals. Photography in the Soviet Union became a medium for radical aesthetic and social experiment.

The second part attempts to construct a historical materialist perspective of the transformation of Ireland from an insular, rural statelet through to the modern, developing, technically advanced member of the E.C. that it is today.

However, the task is not historical in the normalising (linear) connotations of the word. The reading will in part be taken from historical and social criticisms, but the emphasis will be on visual representations of these changes through printed ephemera. Thus the evidence is not conclusive or representative of social reactions, it is probably aligned more so with political and economic dominants.



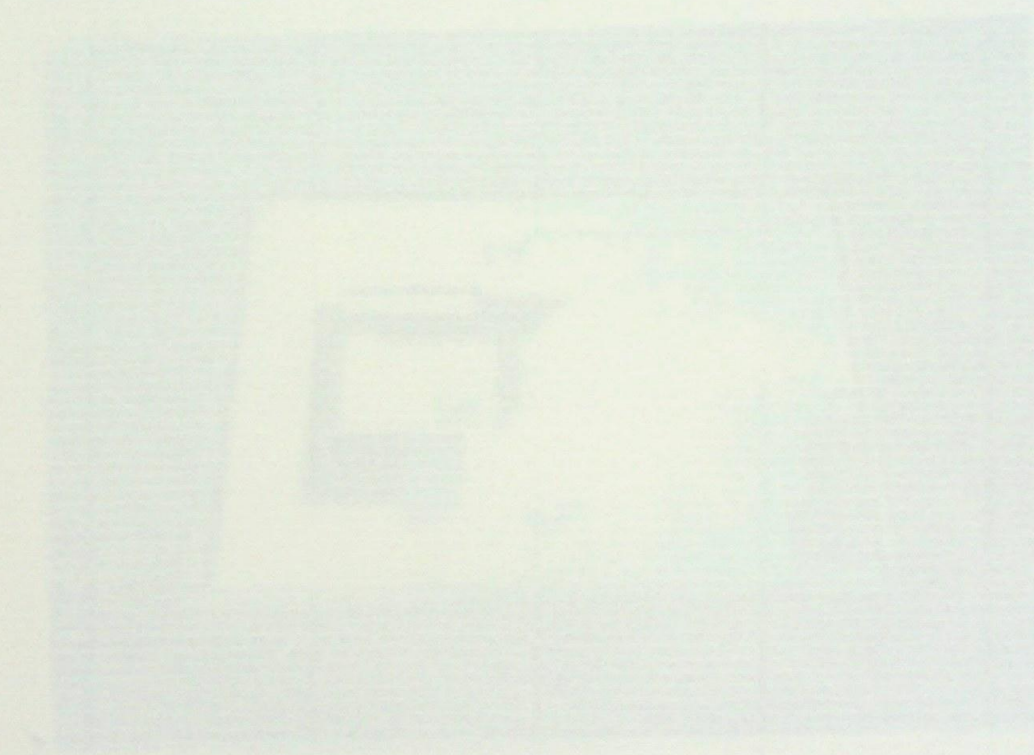
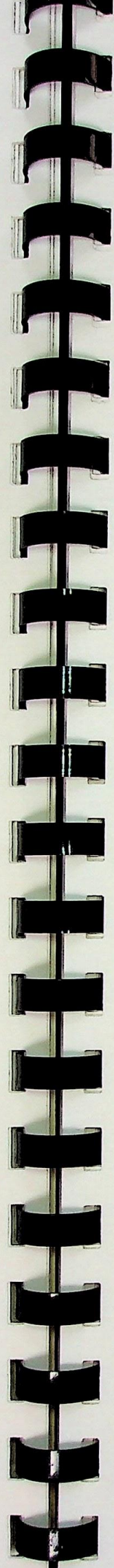
The aims of the thesis are as follows:-

- a) to present a critical analysis of visual material not normally associated with institutionalised cultural studies
- b) to question the biased opinions, either latent or pronounced, that such images mediate
- c) to try to demonstrate that traditional attitudes have always handled rapid social and economic change in Ireland

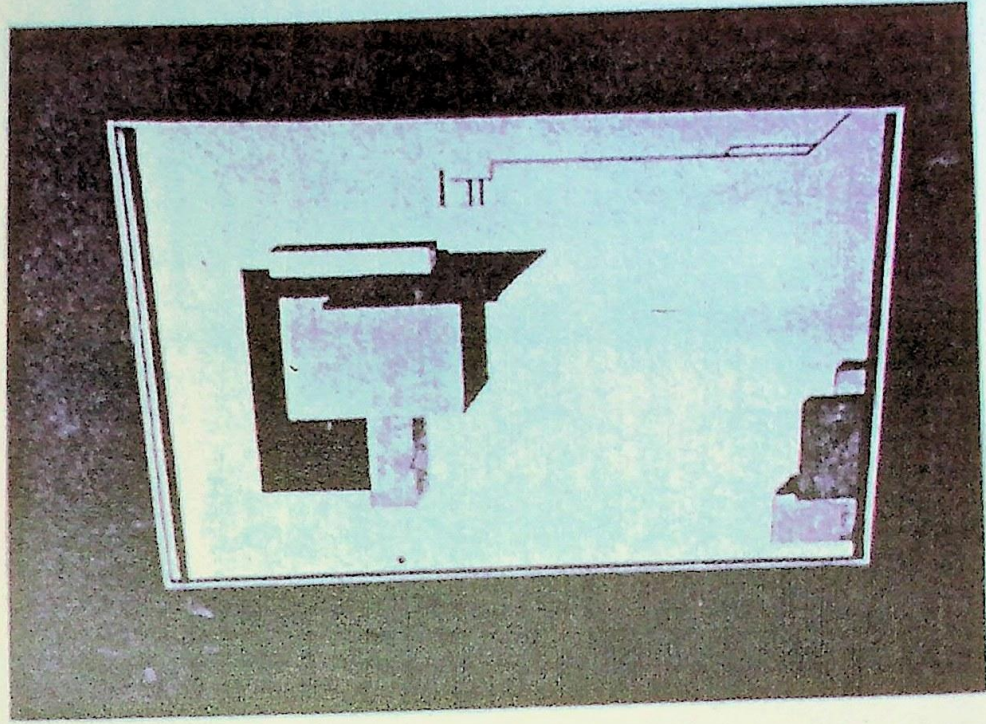
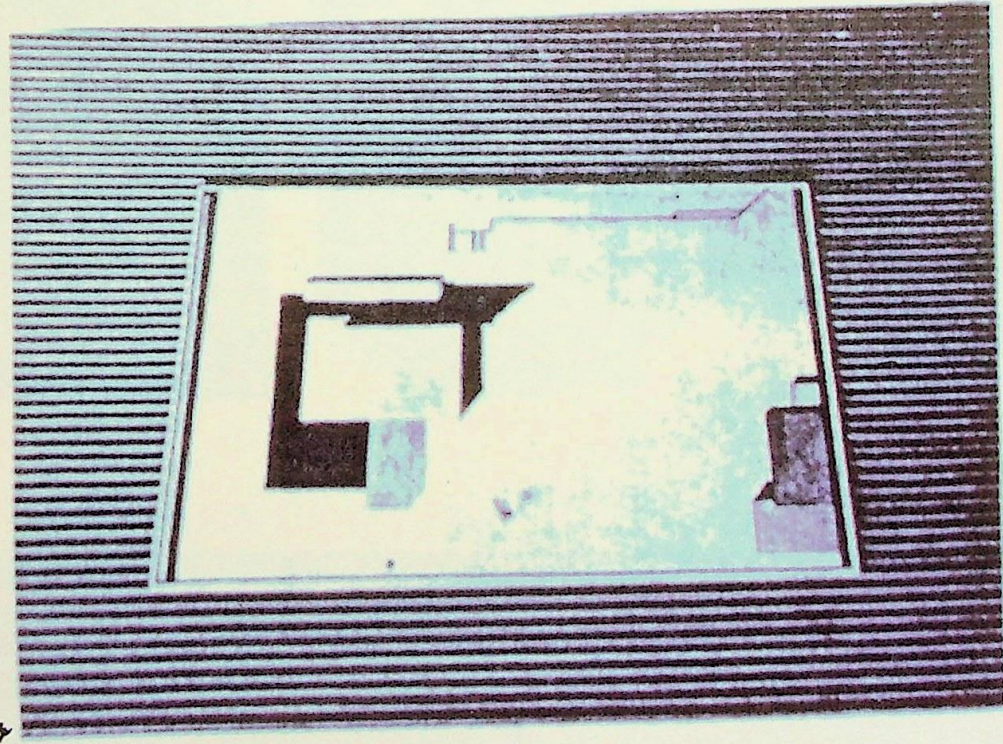
The objectives of the Thesis are as follows:-

- i) to broadly describe some important aspects of economic development
- ii) to compile a selection of photographs 'documenting' and advocating economic change
- iii) to question the faith held in the positive results of technological changes









*El Lissitzky. Floating Volume. 1919. Installed in El Lissitzky's Cabinet of Abstract Art. The two views indicate change from white to black depending on viewer's position.*

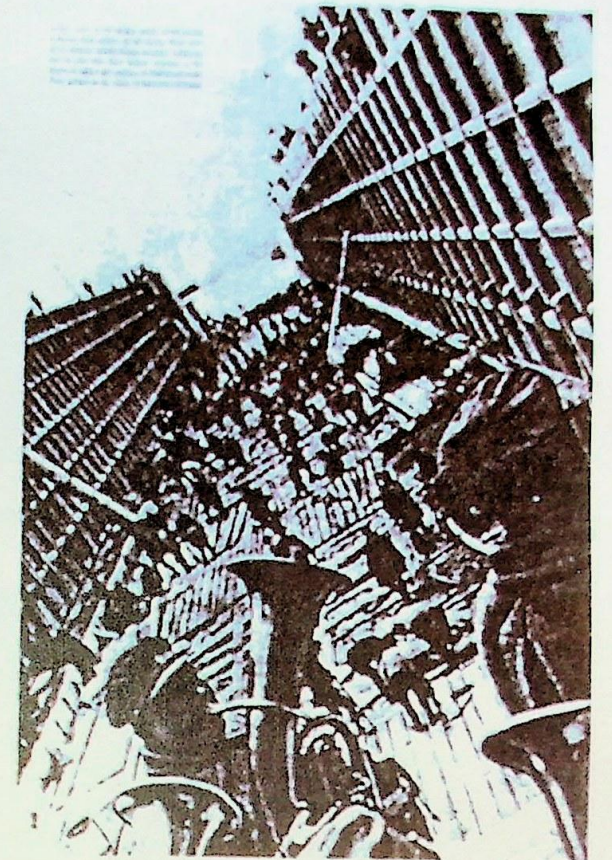
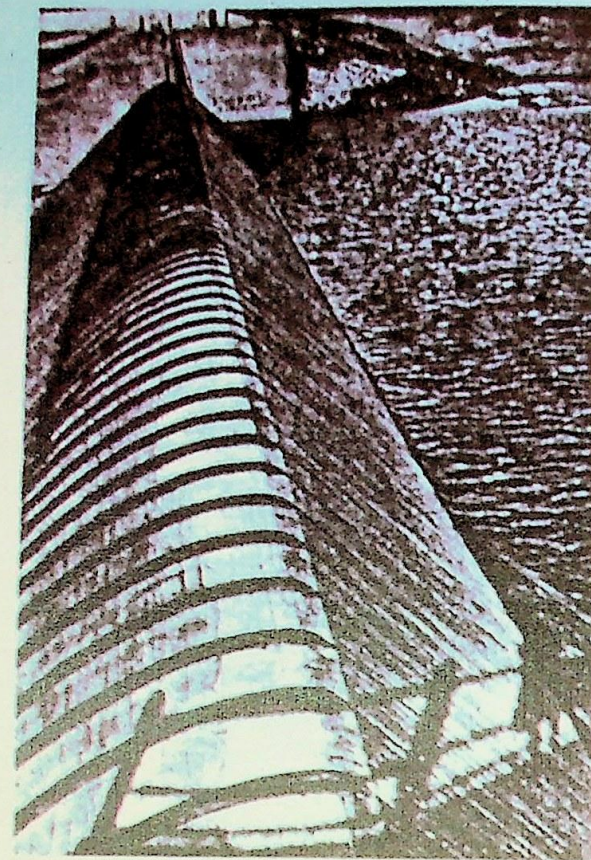
Fig. 1





Fig. 2



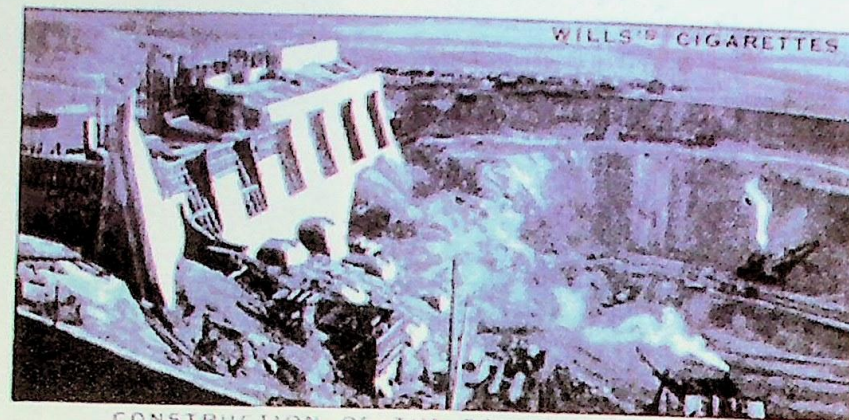


*Alexander Rodchenko. Two pages from the magazine USSR in Construction, no. 12, December 1933. (Special issue on the construction of the Stalin Canal.)*

*Overprinted caption in photograph reads: In the course of 20 months almost 20,000 skilled workmen were trained in 40 trades. They were all ex-thieves, bandits, kulaks, wreckers, murderers. For the first time they became conscious of the poetry of labor, the romance of construction work. They worked to the music of their own orchestras.*

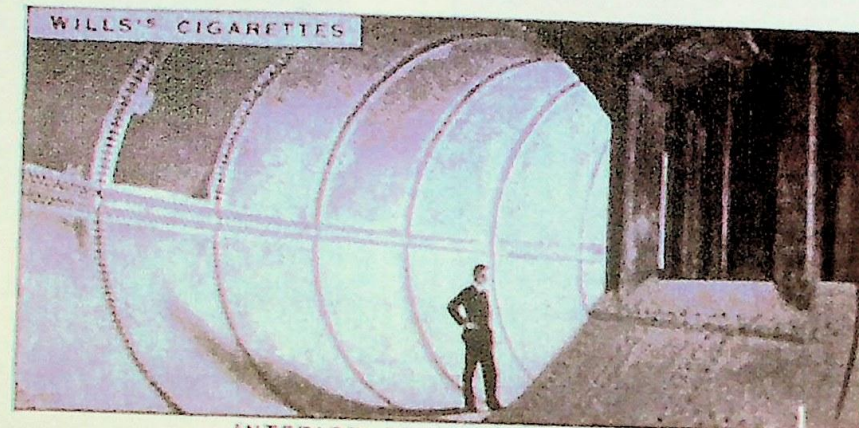
Fig. 3





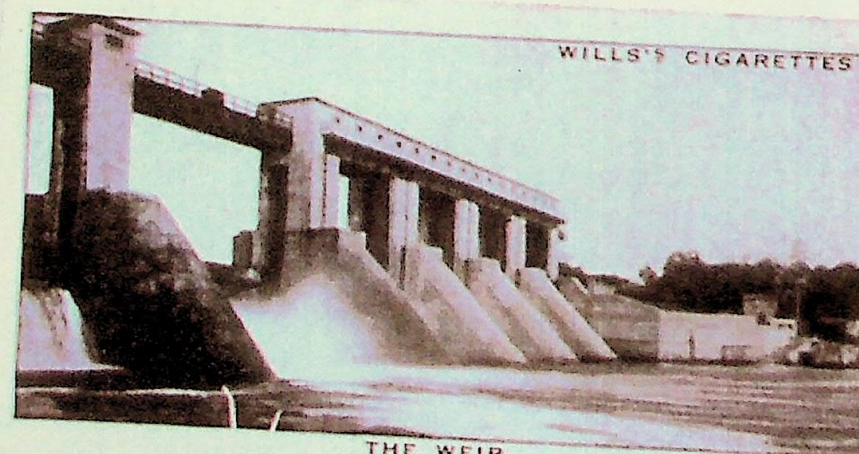
CONSTRUCTION OF THE POWER STATION (A)

Fig. 4



INTERIOR OF SPIRAL CASING

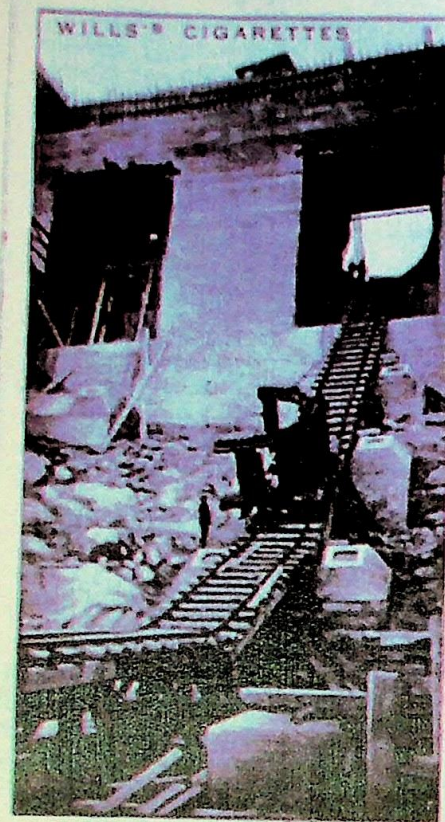
Fig. 5



THE WEIR

Fig. 6





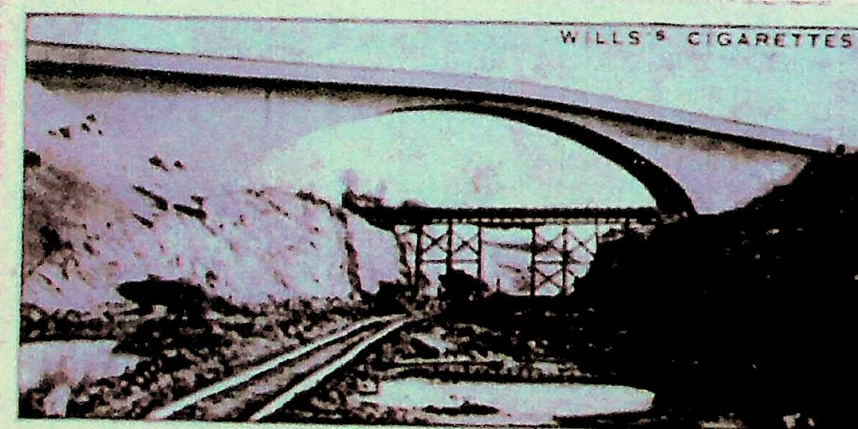
CONSTRUCTION OF THE  
PENSTOCKS (A)

Fig. 7



EXPLODING A CHARGE:  
CONSTRUCTION OF THE HEAD RACE

Fig. 8



BRIDGE OVER THE TAIL RACE

Fig. 9





Fig. 10



Fig. 11



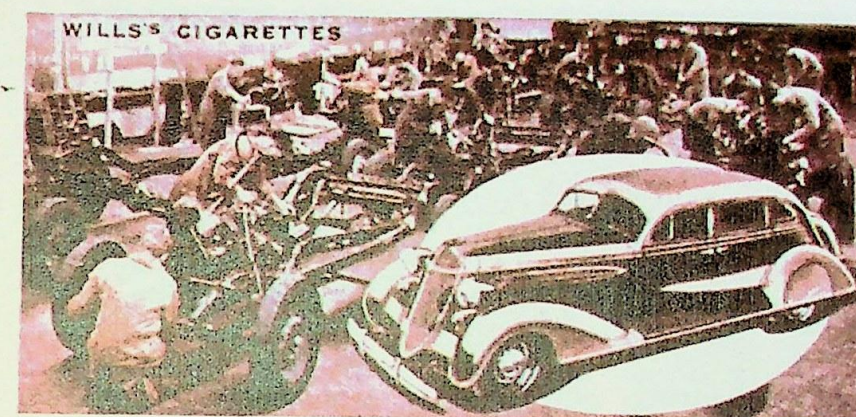
Fig. 12





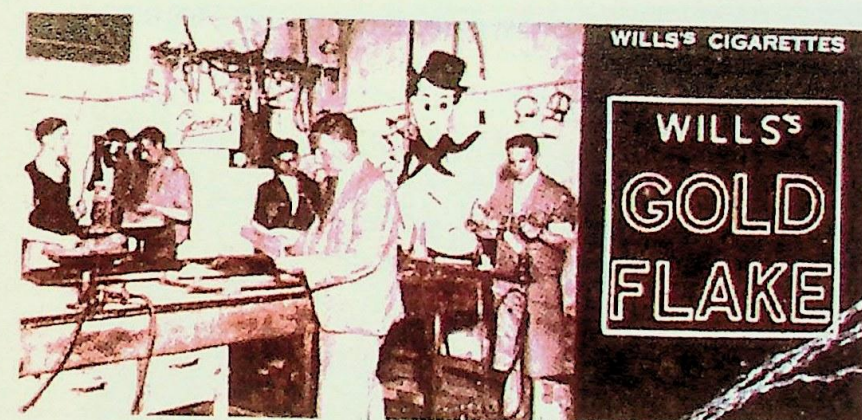
ELECTRIC BULBS

Fig. 13



MOTOR CAR ASSEMBLING

Fig. 14



NEON SIGNS

Fig. 15



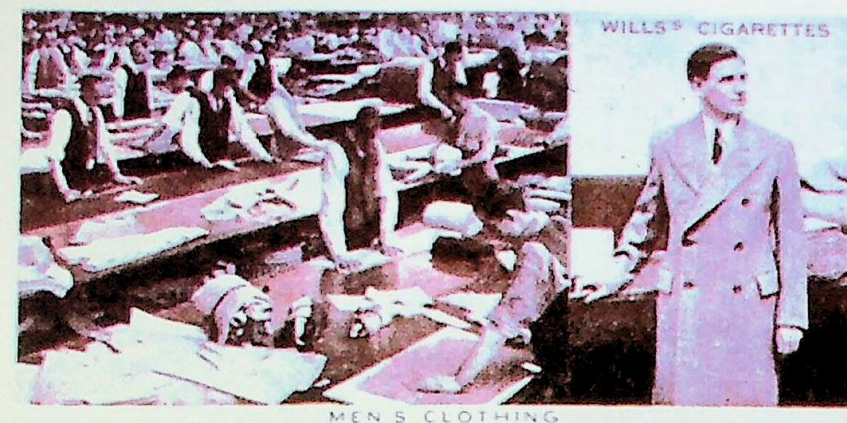


Fig. 16

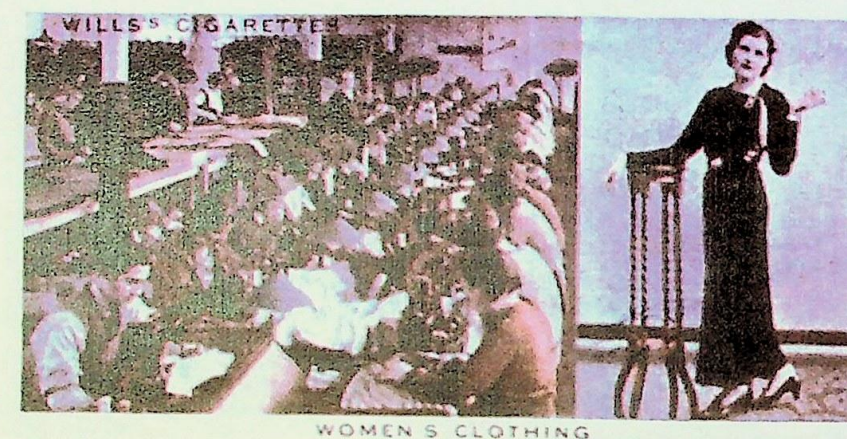


Fig. 17

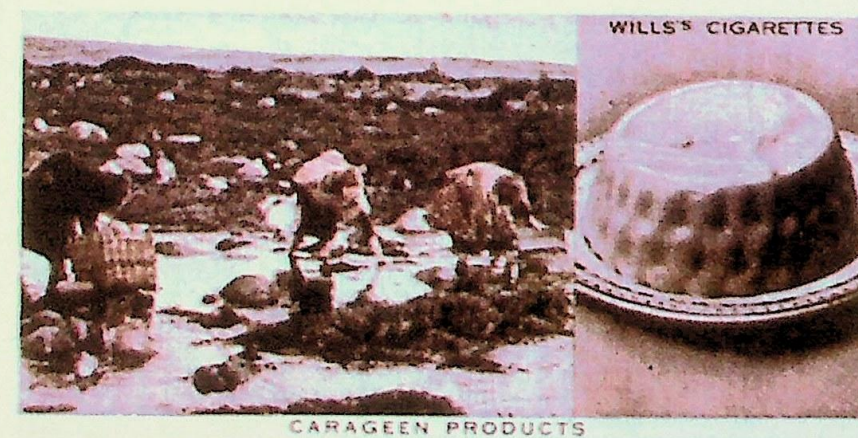


Fig. 18



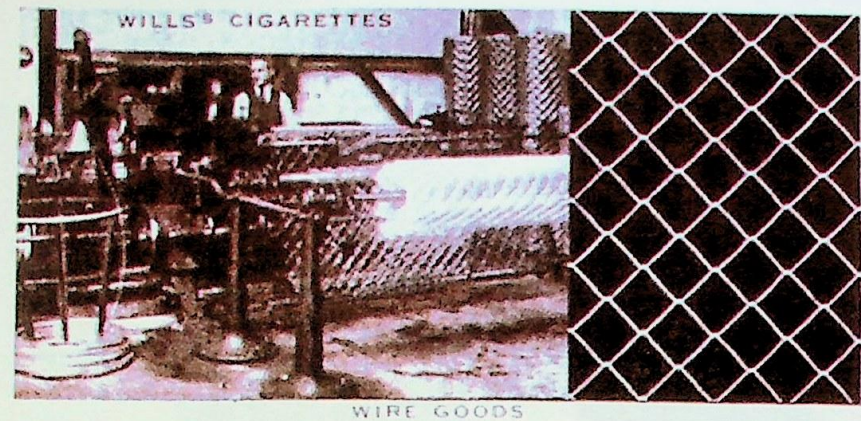


Fig. 19

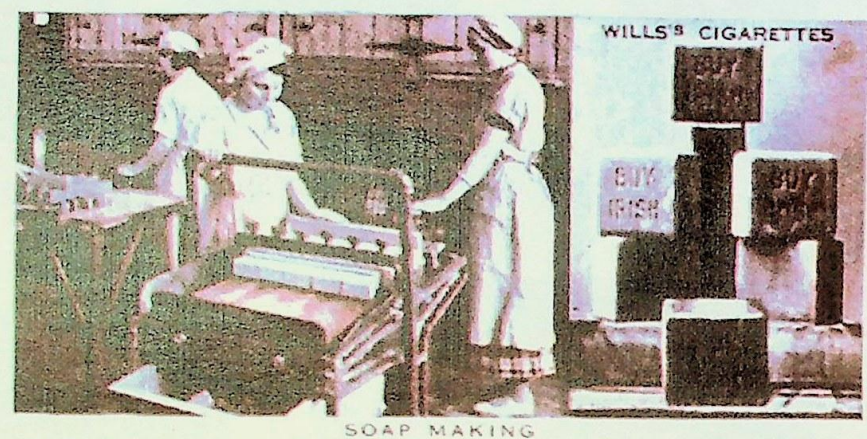


Fig. 20

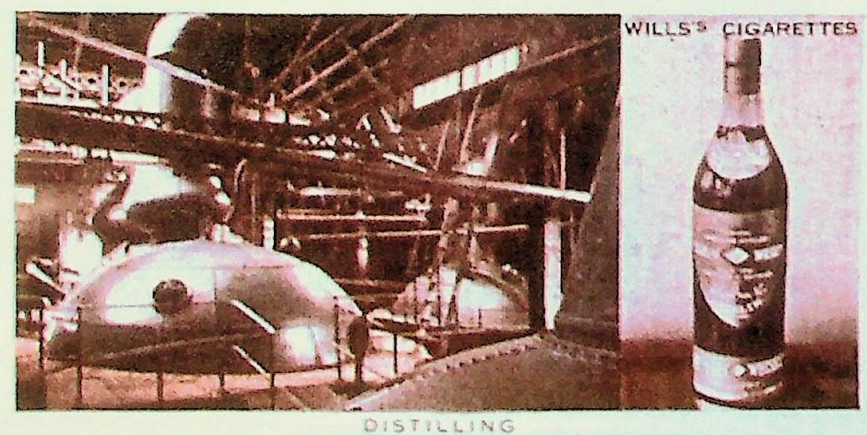


Fig. 21





Fig. 22





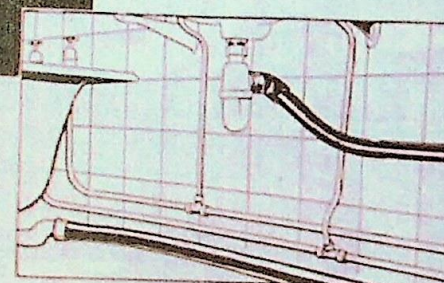
# THEY CHOSE WAVIN

The above photograph shows one of the blocks of flats at Harcourt Road in which Wavin PVC Pipes were chosen for the new pipe drainage system, and where Wavin PVC Structural Gaskets were used throughout.

## Why Wavin?

Perhaps it is because Architects and Consultants know that they can rely on the knowledge and experience which have made Wavin the world leader in hard PVC. We are perhaps too "perhaps" in a word unknown to Wavin, where continuous research and rigid control ensure that nothing is left to chance in producing a first class PVC pipe and system. See Spec B and there. All Wavin products are supported by an unrivalled Technical Advisory Service.

If you have a problem in pipe-work, please don't hesitate to write or telephone.



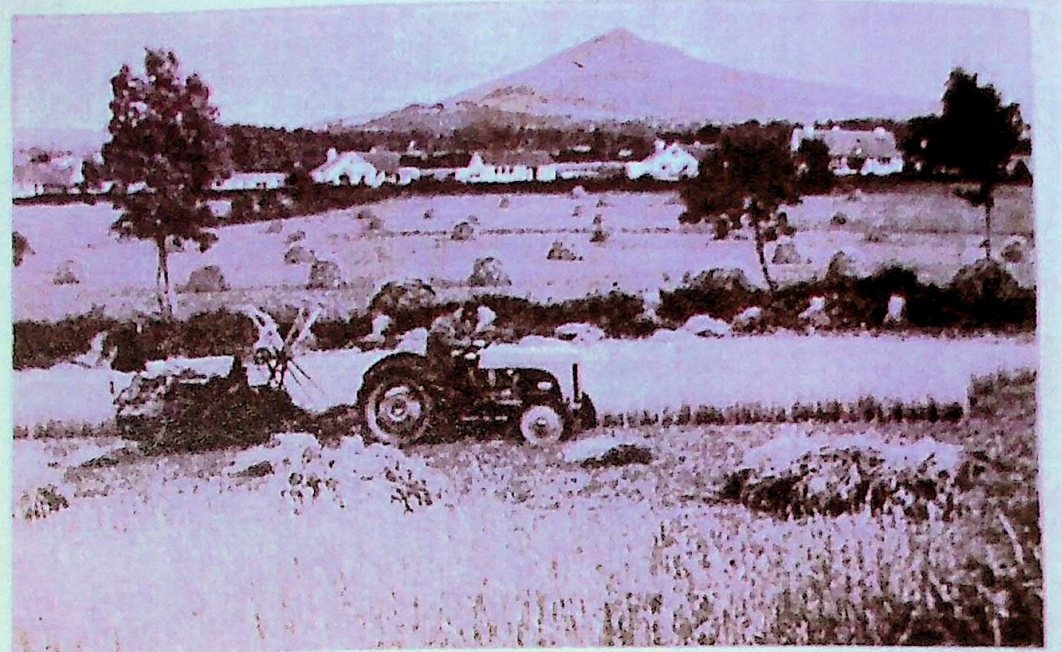
Architect: Mr. Brendan O'Connor, B. Arch, F.R.I.A.I.  
Sub-Contractor: George P. Jegan, Galway  
Contractor: Thomas McInerney & Sons Ltd.

**wavin**

WAVIN PIPES LIMITED, CIAN PARK,  
DRUMCONDRA, DUBLIN 9  
Telephone: 373614 or 48000

Fig. 23





Harvesting scene at Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow

The Industrial Estate at Shannon Free Airport

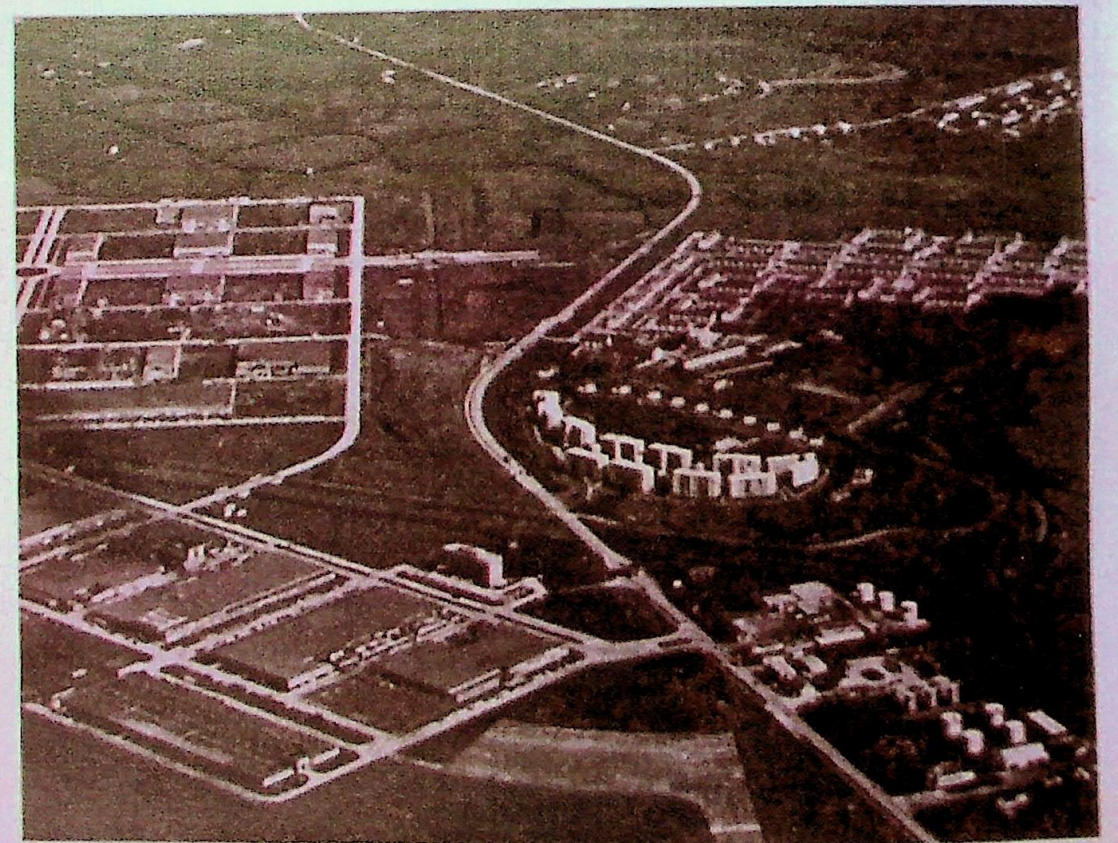


Fig. 24



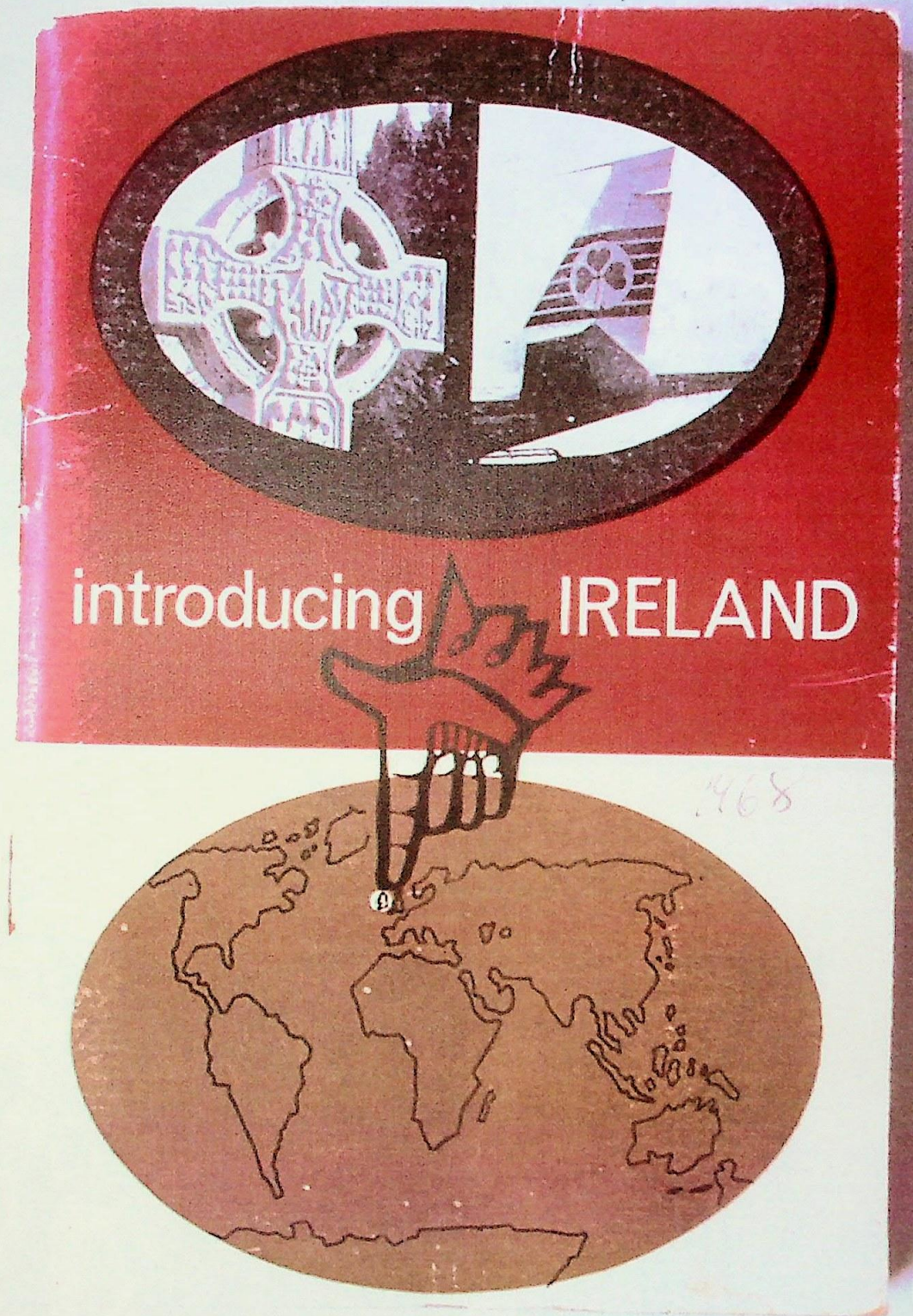


Fig. 25





Fig. 26

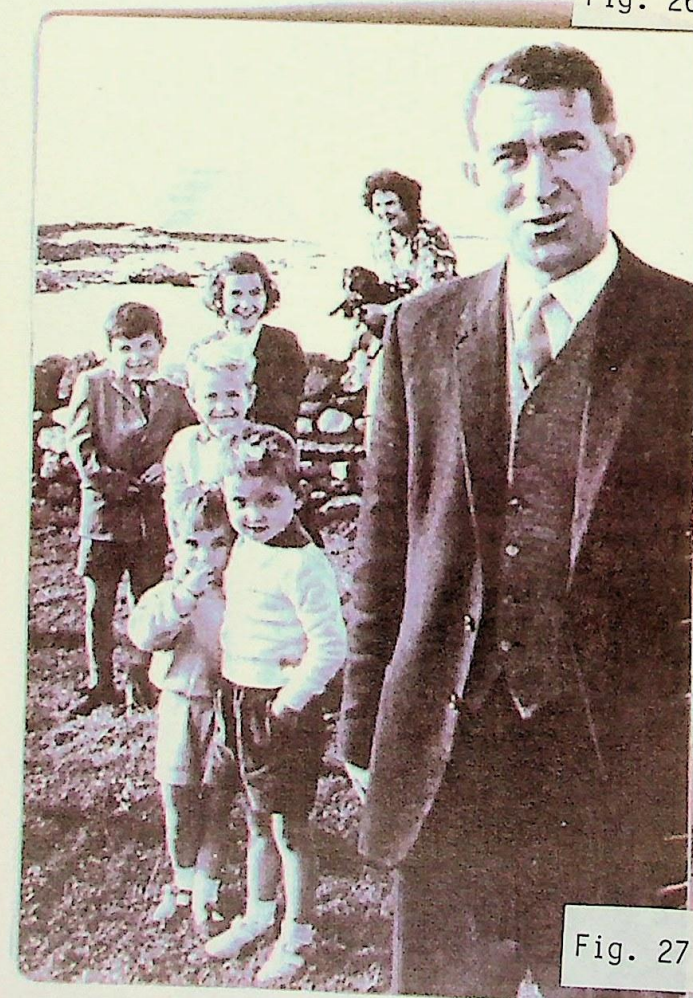


Fig. 27

## INTRODUCTION

The individual measures his welfare in a variety of different ways: by the amount of money he is paid for his work, by the kind of house he lives in, by the food he eats, and the clothes he wears, by what he is able to save, and by the range and extent of his plans for the future.

And he plans for progress in a variety of different ways too. He sets himself objectives: a higher income, a down payment on a house, a holiday in another part of the country or abroad, a motor car, and so on. But the ways in which these will be achieved, the work he does, the demands upon his energy and initiative, they may force certain progress in his conduct, they may, and he is bound to after looking forward to it for months or even years. Yet they are there, not as a rather vague dream, but as a more definite plan, next as a programme of activities, and finally as an achievement.

The same thing happens with nations. A nation's progress is measured in many different ways: by the degree to which its people are housed, clothed and fed, by the social services it develops, by the success with which it maintains its income and expenditure, by the extent to which the working population is employed, and by the worth of that employment in terms of time spent and money earned.

In a democratic society, the hopes and aims of the nation are, broadly speaking, the hopes and aims of the individuals who make up the people of the country. A democratic nation seeks to achieve a consensus of individual opinions and plans its progress in the light of the overall majority view of what is wanted. In Ireland, there is general agree-



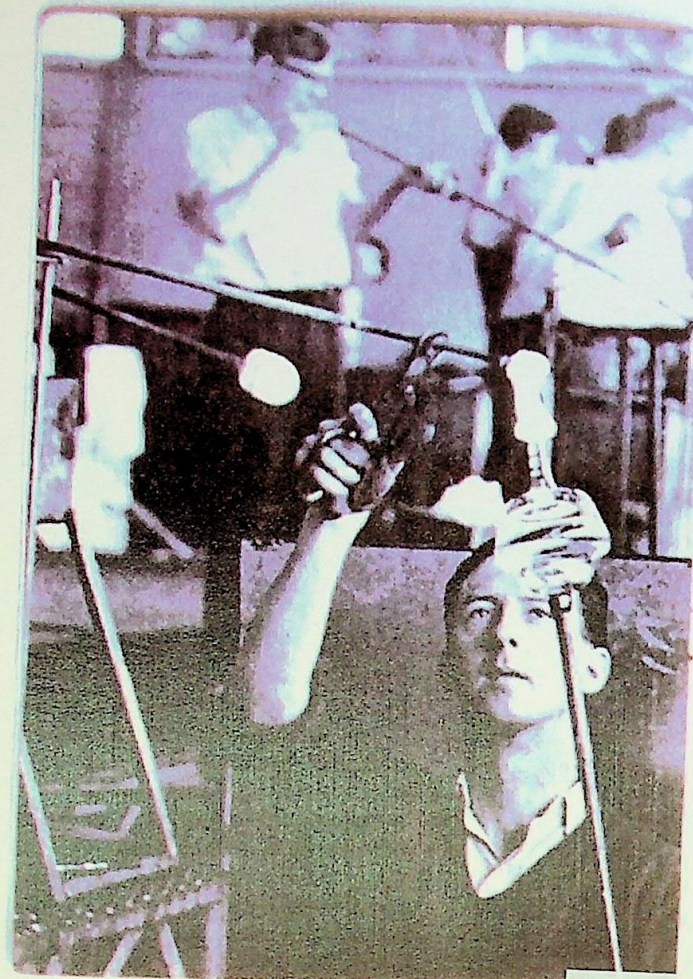


Fig. 28

## OVERCOMING THE PROBLEMS

Unfortunately, the growth of a nation is not simply a question of deciding that agriculture and industry increase their production and expand their exports sufficiently to provide the extra resources needed for capital investment, the creation of new jobs, and the social improvements which are called for by the people. This expansion in production and exports has to be based on the basis of the growth of the economy as a whole. It is not enough to have a few industries which are successful in their own right, but which do not contribute to the growth of the economy as a whole.

What is the way to overcome these problems? The answer is to be found in the growth of the economy as a whole. It is not enough to have a few industries which are successful in their own right, but which do not contribute to the growth of the economy as a whole. It is not enough to have a few industries which are successful in their own right, but which do not contribute to the growth of the economy as a whole.

The growth of the economy as a whole is the key to overcoming these problems. It is not enough to have a few industries which are successful in their own right, but which do not contribute to the growth of the economy as a whole. It is not enough to have a few industries which are successful in their own right, but which do not contribute to the growth of the economy as a whole.

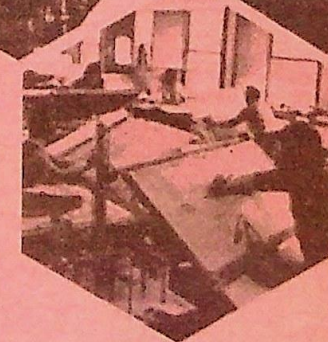
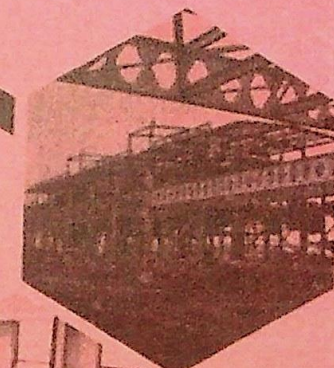
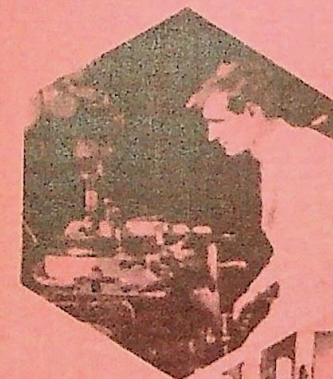







**Ireland**  
work of a lifetime

## Republic of Ireland, the most profitable industrial location in Europe.



US Department of Commerce statistics for the period 74-79 show a 29.9% average annual return on investment for US manufacturers located in the Republic of Ireland - more than twice the European average.

**IDA Ireland**  The Irish government's industrial development agency has offices in London at 58 Davies St., London W1V 1LB. Telephone 01-629 5941.

IDA Ireland also has offices in Dublin, Amsterdam, Paris, Cologne, Stuttgart, Milan, Copenhagen, Madrid, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, Cleveland, Santa Clara, Boston, Toronto, Sydney and Tokyo.

Fig. 29



# IRELAND

The new hi-tech centre  
of Europe

IDA Ireland 

Fig. 30



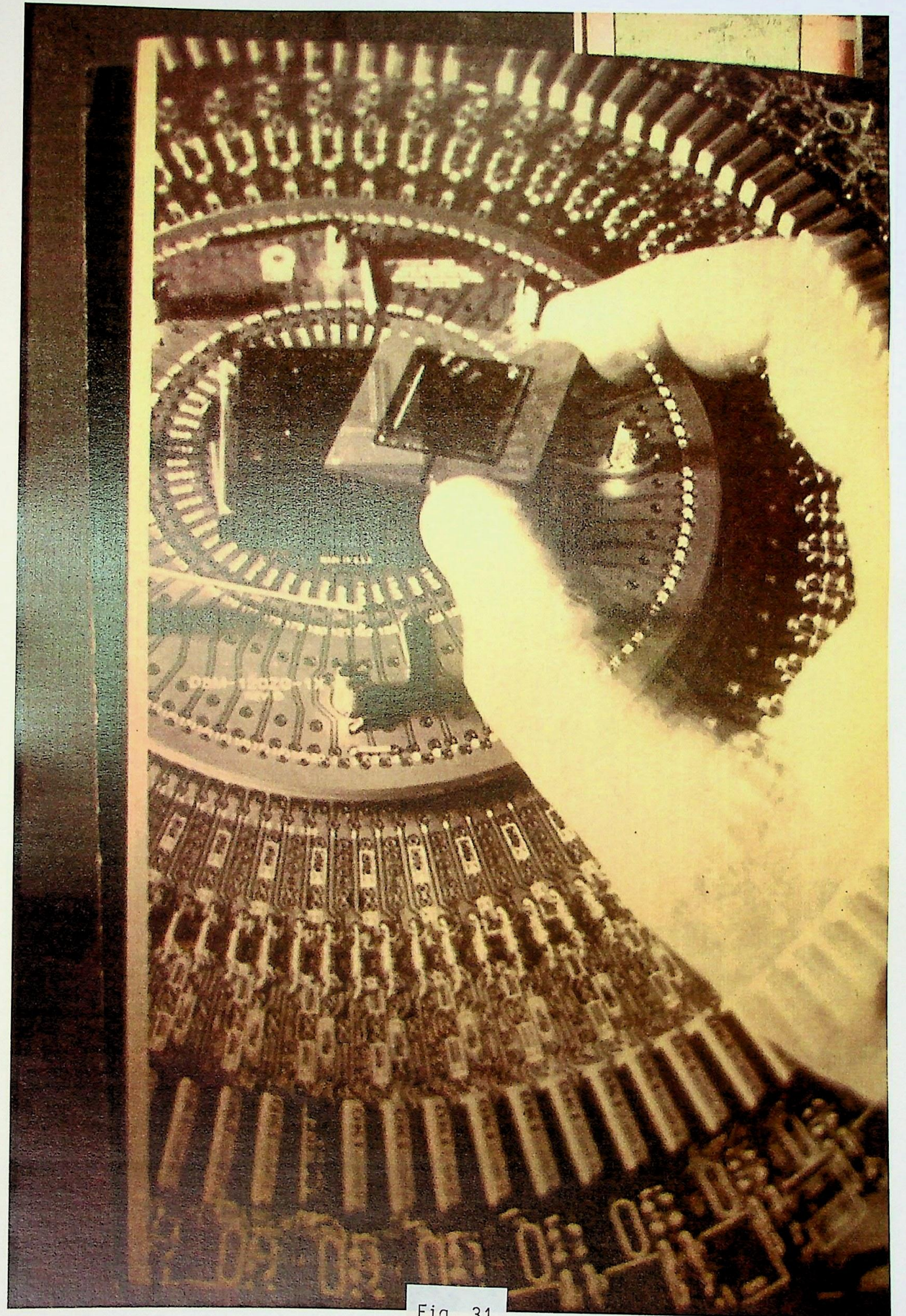
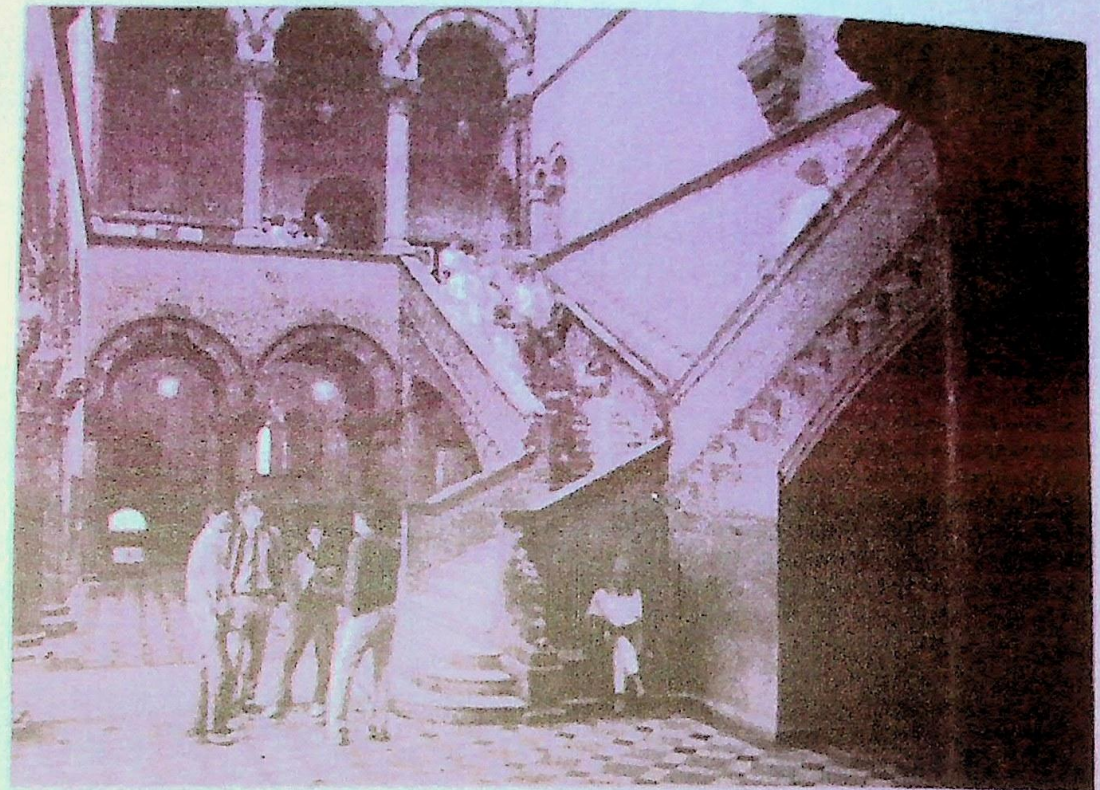


Fig. 31





IN A 16TH CENTURY IRISH UNIVERSITY:  
21ST CENTURY KNOWLEDGE.

**The Irish:**  
The Irish have always had a hunger and respect for education. Today over 40% of our college students choose science and technology.

**Ireland:**  
A member of the European Common Market, noted for its favorable government attitudes towards business. The most profitable industrial location in Europe for US manufacturers.

**Ireland: Home of the Irish. The young Europeans.**

**IDA Ireland** 

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
The Industrial Development Authority (IDA) is a body corporate established under the Industrial Development Act 1986. It is a member of the European Development Finance Institutions Association (EDFIA).  
IDA House, 100-102, North Wall, Dublin 1, Ireland. Tel: 01-479 4444. Fax: 01-479 4445.  
Belfast: 0181 552 100. London: 020 7462 4444. New York: 212 512 5474.

**REPUBLIC OF  
IRELAND**



**"WE'RE THE  
YOUNG EUROPEANS."**

FIG. 6





*"Promises to keep; and miles to go before I sleep."*

*Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"*

The men who built the power station at Ardnacrusha were far sighted, no doubt about it. The Shannon Scheme was a project of daunting complexity, certain to push the technology of the day to its limits. It was deemed difficult, if not impossible, even by many of those who understood the benefits it would bring to the new state.

That the fledgling Electricity Supply Board took it on and completed it is proof of more than a strong belief in the future of Ireland, it was evidence of a technical ability that has served the ESB well, right up to the present day.

Technical expertise and far sightedness.

If you wanted to define the qualities that would best carry Irish companies through 1992 and on into the 21st century, you could choose no better couplet.

These are the qualities the ESB still looks for to drive its own projects in Ireland and abroad. These are the qualities it tries to instill in industry by providing to advance the technologies that will bring new companies into being, by adapting constantly to the changing needs of established firms, by providing the capacity for an industrial environment that will rely more and more on the flexible power of electricity for its plant and processes, by setting up incentive schemes like the ETA Awards, that recognise and reward innovation, ability, far sightedness, enterprise.

The ESB works towards an industrial Ireland in the future led by imagination, fuelled by enterprise, powered by electricity.

The men who built Ardnacrusha would approve. Heartily.



ELECTRICITY SUPPLY BOARD  
100% OWNED BY THE STATE

S E R V I N G   Y O U   B E T T E R





Fig. 34



## INTRODUCTION

Questions of "National Identity" have remained central to Irish intellectual thought since partition. Other post-colonial countries whence national borders have been accepted have re-addressed identity questions along the lines of class divisions, sexual equality and race divisions. Nationality, on the whole, takes a back seat to questions of power within society. Because of the persistent problems of Ulster the national question has never really been settled, no matter how much 'normality' seeks to hide 'crises'. Revisionist critics are continually addressing culture and politics at a 'communal level' rather than the more specific class divisions within more settled countries. The fact that the Labour Party entered a co-alition with Fine Gael holds to the point that Ireland has never really developed a class consciousness. Liam O'Dowd has noted that 'traditional' Irish intellectuals have managed to maintain a 'holistic' approach in the face of continual intellectual specialisation. However, these intellectuals have continued to revise older accounts by nationalist, clerical and literary critics who were part of pre-partition Ireland;

Rather paradoxically, 'traditional intellectuals' preoccupation with Irish identity and uniqueness is in danger of becoming an established intellectual specialism in it's own right. Focussed on the relationship between culture and



politics it has left the analysis of economic and class issues to others. Thus the material framework of cultural and political activity disappears or is hived off as the pressure of specialist intellectuals such as professional economists, civil servants and financial experts. (O'Dowd, 1988, p. 10)

Neo-classical economists have dominated Irish economic thinking up until the 1970's. Basically, the models are the same as those applied to the Anglo-American industrial world, and it can be seen that consumerism as it exists here is no different from consumerism as it exists in the metropolitan centres. But the effects of 'non-economic' factors play a different part in the process of modernisation here than they do in other developing and developed countries. What are suitable tools for explaining or understanding the relationship between foreign economic thinking and its effects, both concretely and ideologically, on Irish society?

It is with great unease, about the generalities of what I am about to say, that I approach this field of study. I wondered was it appropriate to infer so much from such a narrow, yet fragmented, collection of ephemera. By ignoring more dominant institutionalised fields of study I have few ways of giving credibility to the task except by saying that it fills a gap (of some kind) in the field of visual criticism. However, since I do not have a background of media-studies I still have reservations about aestheticising or



historicising these images. None the less, the broadness of the task maintains the potential for my methods to find a singular line of investigation at a future date.

The authority that a documentary photograph holds over its viewer is derived from the association of the camera with 'scientific realism', which is very different from the qualities of a family portrait, inclined towards 'sentimental realism' (Sekula, 1989, p. 160). However, some of the photographs here manipulate that second category (figs. 26, 27 & 28) when referring to tradition as a foundation for its claims of an optimistic future. The two categories here then are not mutually exclusive. Advertising often manipulates a sentimental quality to get its message across to the viewer.

Thus the faith held in developing technologies for greater social democracy needs to be scrutinised. The photograph acts as a mediator of such promises from technology and yet all technologies hold the threat of unemployment. The photograph seeks to represent its human figures as equal partners yet there is always an element of the dominant over the subservient. Abstract photographs of industry and technology can often present the machine as something mystical or fantastic, but it always passes off its imaginary view as scientific document (with the



connotation of official truth; Sekula, 1986, p. 157). What is most important in addressing any form of photography is that it does not carry meaning within itself but depends entirely upon context;

'A technology has no inherent value, outside it's mobilizations in specific practices, institutions, and relations of power.'  
(J. Tagg, 1989, p. 30)



## PART I

### FORDISM (1917 - )

"The artistic climate here [the Bauhaus] cannot support anything that is not the latest, the most modern, up to the minute, Dadaism, circus, variety, jazz, hectic pace, movies, America, airplanes, the automobile. These are the terms in which people here think."

(Oskar Schlemmer from Wollen 1989, p. 7)

Taylor's Principles of Scientific Management, published in 1911 [New York], heralded a new epoch in which the worker would become as predictable, regulated and effective as the machine itself.  
(Wollen, *ibid.*, p. 8)

One important element of the cult of "Americanism" that swept through Europe from the 1920's was the ability of the United States to mass produce commodities at a previously unimaginable scale. New methods of production, which relied on the "belt-system" of factory organisation began at the Ford motor car company at Highland Park, Detroit in 1917. The theory behind this new development was part of Frederic Taylor's studies and experiments in the new field of ergonomics. Rationalisation of manufacturing was the prime aim and, by photographic recording and timed study, one could devise a system of production which gained the maximum efficiency from any worker's involvement. In conjunction with these studied results the idea of a continual "belt-system", at which each person performed their simplified tasks, was developed. The "physical-gestures" of workers were broken down into their smallest units, so that time would not be wasted bending down or picking up tools. Each person would perform a task



which was as straightforward and uniform as possible, such as tightening a series of bolts, or attaching a simple bit to each engine as it passed along the conveyor belt. The speed of the line of products was dictated by detailed study at the preliminary stages of production. This new, de-skilled, "fully-Taylorised" workforce became part of the continual process of production, each carrying out their radically simplified movements - "In effect Fordism turned the factory into a super-machine in its own right, with both human and mechanical parts." (Wollen, *ibid.*, p. 8)

The products themselves reflected this process if one considers the uniform Model-T Ford. The car lacked any style of ornament and every one was painted black. The idea was to strip the car's design of anything that was entirely useless. It was to be straightforward and easily mastered by new drivers. At that particular time, it epitomized what America stood for - egalitarianism.



## FORDISM AND EUROPE

It is very significant that Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union responded most favourable to Taylorism and the advances of American industry in general. It was America which represented progress and the future, Europe represented the older nationalist and imperialist cultures which were seen to be blocking the positive development of technology. The problem for European intellectuals lay in the nature of those new forms of production. The divisions between enlightened thinking and mass production had reached a stage of total opposition for many Marxist critics. (1) The principals of scientific management seemed to alienate workers from their produce to a point which was previously unthinkable. The mindlessness of the tasks involved allowed for an inhuman, anti-intellectual approach to work. Antonio Gramsci wondered whether the simplicity and repetitiveness of the tasks may allow the worker to contemplate something entirely different to his actions, just as one could think and walk at the same time (Gramsci, 1971, trans. pp. 308-310). The brain of the worker could reach a state of "complete freedom" rather than complete idiocy. (2) The important thing for Gramsci was that the older working class should adapt to these new methods rather than resist new technology. In America, adaption was helped by the high wages paid at the Ford plant. However, Gramsci was aware that these high wages would last only as long as Fordism



had a monopoly on this new type of production. In the end, however, Gramsci is favourable towards Fordism and its new working methods. He saw the potential for rational organisation to eliminate what he viewed to be the parasite classes; the people whom he saw to act like parasites on the backs of the working class, such as priests or the "fossilised" civil-service. For Gramsci, Fordism (Taylorism) and prohibition in America went hand in hand with the attempts to curb the excessive activities of the middle and upper-classes, and to re-organise the working classes along new lines.

The criticism then is that both the intellectual and moral reaction against the establishment of the new methods of production, and the superficial praises of Americanism are due to the remains of old, disintegrating strata, and not to groups whose identity is linked to the further development of the new method... The difference between it and 'Europeanism' is not one of nature but of degree.

(Gramsci, *ibid.*, pp. 317-318)



## PHOTOGRAPHY, INDUSTRY IN THE SOVIET UNION

The potential for social revolution throughout Europe after the Soviet Union's success of 1917 allowed some intellectuals to see the positivity of 'instrumental thinking'. From the period of 1900 to 1935 creative artists and philosophers of the avant-garde reversed the previous arguments of aesthetics and expression. The effects of Russian constructivism influenced the work of Berthold Brecht and the writing of Walter Benjamin. At the centre of their newest developments was the importance stressed on new photographic printing techniques. The potential for photographs to reach out into mass society with exacting precision were to become a major part of social enlightenment and planning. Walter Benjamin managed to reverse the traditional argument by claiming that it was not Fine Art which brought individual expression of the real process of production. (3) Painting now became associated with 'aura' and 'mysticism' and had to be experienced privately. Likewise, his previous belief in Surrealism as the proper area of revolutionary art was dismissed in favour of the projects of the German Dadaists and the Russian avant-garde. (4) The 'tactile' quality of the photograph, which could be handled and manipulated by the viewer, would override the cult-value of art. Also the 'shock' value of film could make the everyday and the obvious seem 'strange'. It would train the masses for their new relationship with automation. For Benjamin,



automation, the 'shock' effect of crowds in the city and film would become part of the new psycho-physical make up of the worker. (It must be stressed, however, that Benjamin was very worried about the rise of fascism in Germany and this was the impetus for him to theorise, if belatedly, the work of the Russian avant-garde.)

The elimination of the craft mode of production, which had been superseded throughout the industrial revolution, had now become a major problem for the individual artist with the development of photography. The initial responses to photography back in the 1840's either heralded it as a new universal language or dismissed it as the levelling of genius and art - a subservient technology which at the same time threatened the Romantic culture of that time. Either way, the photograph was seen as the opposite of art, one would eventually have to give way to the other. (5)

The contradictions between Fine Art and mass production were brought to the fore by the Russian avant-garde after the Soviet Revolution. A series of transformations took place as a result, not only in terms of the 'aesthetics' of image production but also in the relationship between the institutions of art and the rapid industrialisation of the Soviet Union. Benjamin Buchloh has addressed the 'paradigmatic' changes that took place there. Initially, the artists that were involved (El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko and Kasimir Malevich among many others) brought



the inherited project of modernism to a head;

... there was the general awareness among artists and cultural theoreticians that they were participating in a final transformation of the modernist vanguard aesthetic, as they irrevocably changed those conditions of art production and reception inherited from bourgeois society and its institutions.

(Buchloh, 1984, p. 82)

The 'final transformation' seemed to bring the whole modernist project (of painting in particular) to a logical conclusion. (6) What was known as *facktura* had addressed the major issue of the self-reflexive in abstract art, not only in terms of reducing art to its formal qualities but also by its interaction with the viewer in terms of actual space rather than pictorial space. The qualities of the later constructivist (*faktura*) objects are closely linked to the more general development forms of social production of that time, such as engineering. This follows in line from the break with history and the past that is of central importance to the theories of modernism. The elimination of stifling traditions and outmoded forms of work meant that society had only to look to a utopian future.

Rationalism and scientific planning were the only ways forward for modernity. As a result *faktura* could be seen as the aesthetic correlative to the primacy of industrialisation which swept Russia; "Technique and industry have confronted art with the problem of construction as an active process, and not a contemplative



reflection". (Varvara Stepanove from Buchloh, *ibid.*, p. 85). We can see how this type of work had an effect on Walter Benjamin's thinking as it predates his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" which was written in 1935, by fourteen years. The example (also from Buchloh's essay) of the first illustration shows us how positive was the prime mover behind these constructions.

The question of the dedication and involvement of these artists in aesthetic production became an increasing problem for them and it was El Lissitzky who left the gallery behind as an area for work. The only exhibitions he became involved with were ones that promoted the industrialisation of the Soviet Union. As a result, many of the Russian artists became directly involved with the project of 'social modernisation' rather than aesthetic 'modernity'. The printing press was heralded as the new medium of the artists for public expression. The abstract constructions of the 'Lef' group gave way to developments of photo-montage which introduced photography in a manner that was still constructive. It represented an attempt to overcome the problems of modernism with the intention of making this new art available to a mass audience. The photograph was seen to have the quality of truth required for documentation, or directly addressing the viewer. Photo-montage was a short transition phase which led to



factography, and it was at this level that the Russian work became fully oppositional to modernism as it existed elsewhere. Not only had the work changed in its design but it was soon realised that the space it occupied would have to be open to mass reception. The instruction manual, book, booklet, poster, film, photofresco and trade fair became the sites for this new propaganda. The transformations are clear if we look at the first three illustrations - the common denominator is scientific management; Taylorism in a revolutionary style. In fact, the Russians had no reservations with seeing their newest work in the light of American advertising (Buchloh, 1984, p. 96) and readily admitted that printing processes developed by technological innovation (which allowed for clearer and larger pictorial definition) were more suitable for their social project than the development of the Dadaists (political) painting sized collages.

The Russian's project was set deeply within a political and social movement which they were totally committed to. The requirements that they develop the use of singular descriptive photographs (now 'their own' rather than the found objects used for montage) in their later works increased as the level of political propaganda increased in Russia. Under Stalin's desire for 'heroic technological achievement' the project of social enlightenment became one of social engineering.



... we could say that the latent element of social engineering, inherent in the notion of social progress as a result of technological development which art could mediate, had finally caught up with modernism's orientation toward science and technology as its underlying paradigms for a cognitively and perceptually emancipatory practice.  
(Buchloh, *ibid.*, p. 111)

The avant-garde position within modernism, as it existed at the beginning of this century, saw the media as a political domain which was to be explored in terms of technical development and its handling for positive social change. However, the rise of Fascism and the use and control of those media in the hands of totalitarian regimes (with the purpose of social engineering) or its position in the hands of Western capitalists (profit being the major requirement) has drawn a halt to critical engagement and involvement in new technologies . (7)

The transition in Western economic culture from Fordism to Post-Fordism and the continual process of automation has created a very different situation for us all in the 1990's.[8] What I would like to do is move our object of study from that previous approach towards Americanism and technologies, as it affected and influenced Eastern European culture, to a place where resistance to change is seen as part of our 'post-partition' cultural make up. The position of the Irish Republic in modernism and modernity has been



traditionally marginal. The initial appearance of Ireland as a rural backwater, continued with Bord Failte's advertising, has registered Ireland as a non-industrial developing state. However, counter to many false conception Ireland has industrialised considerably and I would like to draw the reader's attention to the place of industry, manufacturing and automation in our economic past.

While agreeing that Ireland could be compared economically to countries in South-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, I would say that independence was secured at the time that the Fordist transformations were taking place. It was the ability of the avant-garde to address the importance of industrial change in the Soviet Union that was lacking in Ireland. The fragments of ephemera which sought to popularize developing technologies are frugal and difficult to trace here. However, it may appear that an attempt was made very soon after Irish independence to communicate a positive attitude to changes while at the same time the main emphasis was on historical continuity which had been required by Nationalists to create different social forces in order to achieve independence. Photography had its place in conveying modernity in Ireland, and its methods have changed over the years to that it has spoken the languages of



both internationalism as well as the peculiarities and differences which constitute our national identity as a culture that has somehow kept its ties with a past which is well beyond human memory. [9]

Thus the following section will address how traditional forces have handled the prospects of social, economic and cultural change in Ireland from a period of insularity through to our current position as a production base for foreign owned multi-national companies.



## PART II

### PHOTOGRAPHY AND INDUSTRY IN IRELAND: 'history with a stutter'

This does not represent a comparative analysis with that of the place of photography and industry in the Soviet Union, but the modernist appearance of these cigarette cards (Figs. 4-21) could suggest that the photographers and designers involved were not Irish, or at least had been trained outside of Ireland. This is what is most striking about the prints of the power-station at Ardnacrusha. The extreme camera angles seeking to create that 'heroic' quality are similar to the tactics employed by the Faktographic prints of the Russian 'artists'. The choice of advertising the huge construction project at Ardnacrusha and the early development of Irish manufacturing industries, stands as "off-beat" with the more popular representations of Ireland at that time. Other series were produced depicting Nationalist figures, beauty spots in the Irish countryside, [10] historical ruins and Irish place names; the type of popular images that still pervade publicity photographs and postcards. But it would be surprising even today to see such extensive documentation of economic projects beyond specialized magazines or the odd poster designed for foreign investors interested in Ireland as a place for production.



The Shannon Electrification Scheme (Figs. 4-9) was first proposed to the Irish Free State government in 1922 by the German engineering company Siemens Schuckart. Siemens had become interested by Dr. T. A. McLaughlin who was employed by them as an engineer. It was believed that the River Shannon could be directed at a point below Lough Derg to fuel a large hydro-electric power station which could provide power for the whole of the Irish Free State.

Agreement was reached in February 1924 with the Irish government and passed by the Oireachtas in June 1925, the contract was signed in August 1925 and preliminary work was begun at the Shannon in September of the same year. The project was a large and expensive undertaking for a country as small as Ireland and was debated in detail three times in the Dail. It has been said that few state projects have been debated as thoroughly, or have demanded so much public attention as the Power Scheme. The whole project cost something in the region of £5 million and about 6,000 Irish labourers were employed; the engineering staff being mostly German. One major debate focussed on the rate of wages being paid to the workmen and their standard of living in the village constructed at the site;

"In my opinion that is a very desirable object to aim at - scientific methods, the best organisational processes which are essential in production, whether agricultural or manufacturing, and those methods must run concurrently with an improvement in the standard of life."  
(Thomas Johnson, Leader of the Labour Party)



"Was I to say that we were faced with bankruptcy, that we had profiteering, and that the people were discontented because there was not a realisation of that great Utopia that we imagined in the prosperous years of 1919 and 1920?"  
(Liam Cosgrave, Leader of Cumann na nGaedhael)

"... The Shannon Scheme was something that caught the imagination of the people, not only of this country, but of other countries, and if it had been proceeded with, and if steps had been taken to see that the present unfortunate state of things did not happen [Limerick dock-worker went on strike, preventing the importing of machinery, because of the low wages being paid to the labourers] there is no doubt whatever it could have brought great credit to this country"  
(T. J. O'Connell)  
Dail Debate 3 November 1925.

The Shannon Scheme represented one of the few successes of the Cummann na nGaedhael government and economic thinkers have seen it as a major contributing factor to independent economic growth but also as a **concrete symbol** of national independence;

A project such as the Shannon Scheme was not simply a matter of engineering or the sale of power and light - though in fact these points were very carefully considered by its sponsors. It was also a sign of what people could do to justify their independence. It was a much more potent symbol of nationhood gained than pillar boxes painted green. There will be no understanding of industrial policies and problems until it is recognised that both are set deeply into the nationalist tradition and that they have been judged by far other than merely economic standards.  
(James Meenan, 1970, p. 316)

The scheme was publicised continually in the daily newspapers, addressed by George Russell (AE) in the Irish Statesman, trips were organised to the site from all over the country (something like 100,000 visited the site during



and immediately after construction, school parties still take day-trips there to this day), Sean Keating was commissioned by the Electricity Supply Board to make a series of paintings from the construction (see Figs. 30 & 31) and a stamp was printed celebrating the project.

The actual circumstances at the site were deplorable with hundreds of workers living in makeshift huts, in cramped conditions. Sean Keating has commented on the attitudes of Irish workers to their German and Danish superiors which more often than not was meted in antagonist terms. (This is all part of the traditional management view that Irish workers are too 'laid back' in their attitudes.) [11]

The E.S.B. was the first state sponsored body organised as a public corporation which allowed for state-control but without the obligations of 'nationalisation'. Private bodies were unwilling to take control of the completed scheme and responses from American companies suggested that they did not believe Ireland was capable of handling such a large utility.

The success of the Shannon Scheme increased the potential for developing a sound economic order on which to build a strong national identity. However, the world economic downturn and its effects during the 1930's meant that many governments turned to 'job creation' as a way of alleviating decreasing incomes. The rise of protectionist



policies and the idea that self-sufficiency was an economic possibility led to the rapid increase of manufacturing industries in Ireland at that time. Figures 10 to 21 are part of a series of 50 cigarette cards, printed in 1937, which sought to illustrate the range of products being produced in the home market.

The sophistication of the photographs and their graphic quality suggests, once again, that they were the work of a foreign trained photographer [12]. If we seek to read these cards as aesthetic objects we run the risk of removing them from their historical particularities, but if we see them as historical documents, we run the more dangerous risk of attributing an unbiased, truth quality to them. The economic distress of the 1930's is nowhere to be seen; the text at the back of the cards seeks to extend the myth of continual progress and development. It could also be said that they seek to counter the reality of mass emigration from Ireland, by making it look as though the standard of living equals that of developed countries, i.e. by the measure of commodities available and produced here. Some typical examples lay claim to international standards, while at the same time emphasising material achievements;

"The manufacture of this non-essential article entails the use of intricate modern machinery and the tuition of experts from abroad, but eventually native labour only will be required."  
(Fig. 13)



The lack of skill among native labour meant that tuition had to come from abroad. The protectionist policies of the 1930's forced foreign companies to produce in Ireland to avoid the protective tariffs. However, this did hamper some export companies such as Ford in Cork.

The strive for self-sufficiency was successful in that it alleviated employment problems for the short term as well as helping to develop native industry (a tactic employed by many newly independent, developing countries at that time) against foreign competition. However, conflicts arose between the desires for industrial growth and domestic ownership of these industries; industrial growth was given priority towards the end of the 1930's (Dermot McAleese, 1986, p. 91). The identification of political independence with economic self-sufficiency was beginning to waver under the strain, as living standards continued to decrease.

The 'inward looking' policies of the de Valera government are what gave it its credibility among the electorate. The view that Fianna Fail was a people's party, with the rural and urban poor at heart, led to a lack of critical politics, and the division between pro- and anti- treaty forces overshadowed much of the debate about economic policies. Independent economic thinking at that time just did not exist (Lee, 1989, p. 580). Economic theories of the developed countries were applied to



developing countries even though 'non-economic factors' play a much more important role in a country such as Ireland. The continued dominance of ties of patronage in the countryside resisted attempts to modernise and the traditional dominance of the Catholic church resisted attempts to secularize Irish society. The difficulties of the war years meant that change could not be perceived until the arrival of Marshall Aid. It was during the late 1940's that the project of rural electrification began and this was a major factor in turning Ireland into a fully fledged capitalist society.

Marshall Aid financed a film called "The Promise of Barty O'Brien" with the intention of encouraging the rural population not to resist electrification. The Marshall Aid Programme's Economic Co-operation Administration (E.C.A.) helped to train technicians and engineers. The drama documentary was written by Sean O Faolain (whose attitudes to modernisation were reserved, to say the least). The film is interesting in that it presents America as a consumer's technological utopia, whereas Dublin is an 'alien', inhospitable place (Rickett, 1988, pp. 82-84). This bias towards Americanism was reflected in the transition of Marshall Aid Programme shifted from one of economic aid to the organisation of defence agreements and, since Ireland refused to join N.A.T.O., it meant the end of monetary input from America.



The huge rise of emigration during the 1950's meant that a change in protectionist policies was required and the First Programme on Economic Expansion of 1959 opened the doors to foreign investment. Two years later, Ireland applied for members' of the E.E.C.. The success of the post-war boom in the American economy was having an effect on the world-economy that has had far reaching implications. At this stage, however, it was a very different economic culture to that of pre-war Fordism. The rise of the electronic industry had led to new forms of automation in industry and America was looking for new production bases from which to infiltrate the European market. The appeal of Ireland as a platform to Europe lay in the fact that the population of the West coast (where the I.D.A. sought to provide the working facilities) were unfamiliar with large scale production industries and were very disorganised compared to the strength of labour movements in the rest of Europe. In 1962 the telecommunications industry hit Ireland with the opening of Telefis Eireann and at the same time the Second Vatican Council began its revitalisation and modernisation of its strict Catholic doctrine. Figures 22-25 illustrate the rapid modernisation that took place at the time. 1960's high-modernism with its international emblems was readily heralded as the end of the stifling traditions of 'blind faith', 'the sanctity of family life' and 'community values'.



Labour leaders were confident that Nationalism was no longer the dominant ideology but that class divisions from now on could become central to the political agenda.

The Shannon Free Airport scheme was an important internationalist (multi-national?) development. Set up as a large Free Trade Zone, the project had all the trappings of the 1960's formulae (Figs. 23 & 24). The whole community was built from scratch; workplace, roads, flats and houses represented the 60's belief that tradition was no longer an important element for social and economic success. Since Nationalist tradition was viewed as resistant to change the internationalism of that decade attempted to break with the problems of history.

However, while all this was happening it will prove interesting to take a look at the pamphlet which loosely defined 'The Third Programme; Economic and Social Development 1969-72'. Designed for popular consumption rather than specialised study, the booklet seeks to outline not only the proposed targets but also the aspirations of each individual in relation to his general welfare (Figs. 26-28). The photographs are striking because of the apparent contradictions between the new consumerism and what had previously constituted traditional Ireland, now supposedly in decline. The cover photograph reminded me first of some kind of Second World War propaganda image. The conflict between the children (all male, incidentally) framed between the 'natural' emblems of traditional rural



Ireland with the bright red text reading 'Ireland Tomorrow' - the conflict must be intentional; maybe the children are looking to a future which has not yet been realised and thus cannot be photographed.

If we look to the first illustration inside the booklet, our fears are realised. The setting, the poses, even the amount of 'space' on the picture plane, all lay claim to the traditional hierarchies of the Irish family. The prominence of the father at the front of the picture, with his four sons behind him, his daughter behind them and his wife perched on his shoulder like a parrot, carrying the family pet. All of this framed within the uniquely Irish landscape, perfectly proportioned between grass, wall, shore, headland and sky. The image is ripe for deconstruction as an emblem of power.

"... the comparison of the individual with the society of which he forms a part provides the answer. Just as the head of any family must be the one who makes the plans and decisions, so in a nation it must be the role of Government to interpret the aspirations of the people, and to draw up the programme by which they will be achieved."

(The Third Programme: Economic and Social Development 1969-72, p. 6) [my emphasis]

If we look at other images from the same pamphlet we see more evidence of this authoritarianism; industry is not seen as mass production, but craft skills in the form of a glass blower. The imported industries and technologies of the 1960's more often than not required unskilled labour,



not artists and craftspeople. The farmer is not seen working with labour-saving farm machinery but instead is carrying a calf by hand, possibly suggesting the mythical story that if he carries the calf every day, he will eventually be able to carry the fully grown bull. And then the last picture of the thatcher smoking his pipe outside the cottage conveys the myth that traditional craft industries can thrive alongside the new industrialisation.

After looking at all of these images the rhetoric of 'combined effort' and 'consensus of individual opinion' must be viewed with extreme scepticism. It comes as no surprise that the I.D.A.'s policies of job creation within the western regions soon turned into that of wealth-creation, which meant that returns on investments were directed into the metropolitan centre rather than used to further develop the areas most hit by emigration.

The Third Programme was dropped before its completion, or rather, it was 'quietly shelved' as the problems of State control of the economy were exasperated by consumer spending on foreign imports (Lee, 1989, p. 354).

The developing 'information technologies' have been consistently attracted to Ireland by the I.D.A. since the 1960's. The high costs of production have meant that multi-nationals avail of corporation tax incentives in countries such as Ireland. However, not only have these



companies set up production bases here, but the equipment they produce for data-processing has been in use in Ireland since 1957. But the mystique of the product is actively promoted by the use of photography in advertising the various new electronic equipment (see Figs. 29, 30 & 31)

It has been suggested that the development of information technologies has created a new division between 'knowledge' workers and others. Understanding the operation of these machines is often seen as the key to mobility or status within the office workspace. The brochures used to advertise such equipment often present us with senior management leaning over secretaries explaining how to use the equipment. [TELL THAT TO THIS TYPIST!!]

A major part of the new Customs House Dock 'financial services centre' involves Bord Telecom constructing 'state-of-the-art communications facilities'.

The Customs House development may materialise as a pontifical high-tech island of privilege surrounded by the sprawling dereliction of impoverished and marginalised inner city Dublin (Desmond Bell, 1988, p. 223)



## CONCLUSION

" the new traditional intellectuals have reached for the problem of identity and a belief in the primacy of ideas to the near-exclusion of the evolving material content of these ideas" (O'Dowd, 1988, p. 16)

The modernisation of Irish society has led not only to changed material circumstances for society in general, but has also had a major effect on the position of intellectuals within its particular institutions. Yet with such rapid economic transformation it is surprising how institutional boundaries have managed to remain intact (I am thinking here particularly of Fine Art courses). In attempting to redress the balance somewhat (if only in general terms) the examples of visual culture from the Russian avant-garde register some of the problems faced by visual artists, the material on the Irish case seeks to outline the material framework within which any resistance must take place.

The question of 'function' must also be seen within this broad framework. The resurgence of traditional problems for the whole of Ireland since the end of the 1960's has created a mood of pessimism that threatens to give free reign to advancing consumer society. 'Regressive modernisation' which moves forward with little or 'no commitment to social, political or cultural' change will no doubt increase as the level of technical specialisation



increases. Fine Art students are well aware of the bureaucratic view that they serve no real function and have had to face up to increasing demands for Rationalisation. Critical cultural practices have hardly gotten off the ground in Ireland when they face the backlash of the 'New Right' 'monetarism'.

The elements of the 'New Right' as they have appeared in Germany, Britain and the U.S.A. during the 1980's point to the underlying currents of traditionalism within their economic policies. From an Irish perspective, it is hoped that the work of the traditional intellectuals, supported by a more rigorous materialist analysis may enable us to foresee and plan a strategy when facing the prospects of monetary union in 1992. The radical changes expected will, no doubt, cause many problems for concepts of identity.

The expression of a new-found Romanticism in the 1980's once again poses the problems caused by our identity as a country 'steeped in history'. Perhaps a more rigorous investigation of present realities, while keeping in mind the lesson of history, will enable us to form an exploratory system which can identify the problems confronting social change.



## END NOTES

1. I draw here from Jurgen Habermas' 'Modernity; an incomplete project' in Hal Foster (ed.) 1985, Post Modern Culture  
In this essay Habermas examines the failed project of the Surrealists to re-unite art with society in relation to the development of 'Enlightenment thinking'.
2. Charlie Chaplin's film 'Modern Times' (1936) is a memorable vision of the Fordist worker out of control as a result of the mindless repetitive task of tightening bolts.
3. The important thing for Walter Benjamin and Bertholt Brecht was that artists should seek to turn consumers into producers of meaning as collaborators rather than the traditional Western relationship between the art object and viewer.
4. Surrealism seems to be the only modernist avant-garde art form that actively rejected addressing automation.
5. John Tagg explores some comments on photography from the 19th century in 'Totalled Machines' (1989)
6. Artists not involved with the Lef group either gave up exhibiting their work or emigrated to Europe.
7. Desmond Bell looks back to the work of the 'constructivists' and 'dadaists' as a type of 'social and political engagement' as a critical tradition that is, unfortunately, lacking in Ireland.
8. The difference between Fordism and Post-Fordism forms of production are examined by Michael Rustin in 'The Politics of Post-Fordism: or, The Trouble with 'New Times'? in New left Review No. 175, 1989. In a footnote on pp. 56-57 he lists the ideal types of each mode in terms of production and regulation.

### Fordism

low technological innovation  
- fixed production lines

### Post-Fordism

accelerated innovation  
high variety of products,  
shorter runs.



mass marketing	market diversification and niche-ing
steep hierarchy, vertical communication	flat hierarchy, more lateral chains of command
mechanistic organisations vertical and horizontal integration, central planning	organismic organisations autonomous profit centres network systems; internal markets within firm; out-sourcing
bureaucracy	professionalism; entrepreneurialism
mass unions, centralised wage bargaining	localised bargaining; core and periphery; workforce divided; no co-operation
unified class formation dualistic political systems	pluralist class formations, multi-party systems
Institutionalised class compromises	fragmented political markets
Standardised forms of welfare proscribed courses of education	consumer choice in welfare, credit transfer, modularity, self-guided instruction; independent study
Standardised assessment (O Level)	teacher based assessment (G.C.S.E.) or self- assessment
class parties, nationwide	social movements; multi- parties; regional diversification

N.B. This scheme applied to the 'core' rather than a periphery such as Ireland where more of the Fordist elements persist.

9. "... The time consciousness articulated in avant-garde art is not simply ahistorical; it is directed against what might be called a false normativity of history"

10. Wills' Cigarettes commissioned Jack B. Yeats to paint a series of images about Irish 'place names' to be printed as cigarette cards. Jack Yeats' art work has increased in value so much recently that the value of the cigarettes cards has also increased



dramatically. Although the cards depicted here are not the work of Yeats, they are, however, worth about 80p each and increasing in value as collectors' items.

For the photograph as 'exchange value' see John Tagg - "The Burden of Representation" (1988), "Totalled Machines" (1989) and Allan Sekula "Reading an Archive..." (1986).

11. Small trains were used to transport workers up and down the canals; a rupture in the line could mean a loss of several hours' work, thus the story of a German chargehand's response to Irish labourers: "Buggy break - Paddy laugh!"

12. Unfortunately, I have encountered problems tracing the name of the photographer. It appears the only way of finding out would be to go through the accounts of Will's Cigarettes to find a note of payment.



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