

COMMON FACTORS/VULGAR FACTIONS

Jeff Nuttall and Rodick Carmichael, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1977

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A kitsch-covered coffee table book that performs the Northern equivalent of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, or Gilbert Adair's *Myths & Memories*. Short, lyrical and sharp cultural dissections of working class British life (circa 1977), at times melding into surreal fictions, the writers wield their sharp and amusing pencils on fashion, town life, Harry Ramsden's fish and chips, clothes, the newspapers and, most crucially, sex. Eroticism and obscenity are two of Nuttall's favourite topics, and are explored with panache, and illustrated with appropriate sleaze, across the sort of inventive off-beat criticism that hasn't transferred into similar modern texts. An of-its-time production, but relevant and readable.

- M.J. Nicholls

Common Factors/Vulgar Factions

Gardens . . . Shop Fronts . . . Dress . . . Pubs . . . Motor Cars . . . Sport: these are some of the ways in which the suburban dweller can assert his identity against encroaching respectability. They are also some of the genera' headings which Jeff Nuttall and Rodick Carmichael use as the basis for their investigation of the sub-culture of urban life, particularly in the North of England during the first half of the twentieth century.

The main theme of their book is the extraordinary quality to be found in the leisure culture of the major cities: a popular aesthetic, made up of scraps and pieces of dead styles, cliched ornament and plundered pastiche, revamped and revitalised with startling vulgar vitality. The authors believe that this language of the commonplace, often called 'bad taste', may reveal far more about the true nature of modern society than the consciously styled structures through which the age of technology attempts to create an identity. Information, reminiscences, anecdotes, character sketches, fantasy, sociology, and numerous photographs (of people, places and objects) are brought together under each heading to express the often contradictory, but always mutually enlightening views of the authors.

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The process of educating the public appears to have started fairly early in the department's existence with an art exhibition in 1939, photographs of which still exist.¹⁴ A wide variety of arts and crafts were on display, but the exhibition's purpose was clearly pedagogic as a poster on the introductory panel read:

ART IS INTEGRATING
ARCHITECTURE PAINTING
SCULPTURE AND LIVING
THE WELL MAKING OF
THAT WHICH NEEDS MAKING

EATING DRESSING HOUSING
ENGINEERING

FIRST IN A SERIES OF EXHIBITIONS
OF THE WORKS OF THOSE
MOVING TOWARDS THIS
SYNTHESIS ¹⁵

15 PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry Exhibitions' Photo 26/02

Sarah Helen Walford M.A.(Dist.): 'ARCHITECTURE IN TENSION:An Examination of the Position of the Architect in the Private and Public Sectors, Focusing on the Training and Careers of Sir Basil Spence (1907-1976) and Sir Donald Gibson (1908-1991)', Vol 1, Department of History of Art, University of Warwick, May 2009