FILLIP *Issue No. 17*

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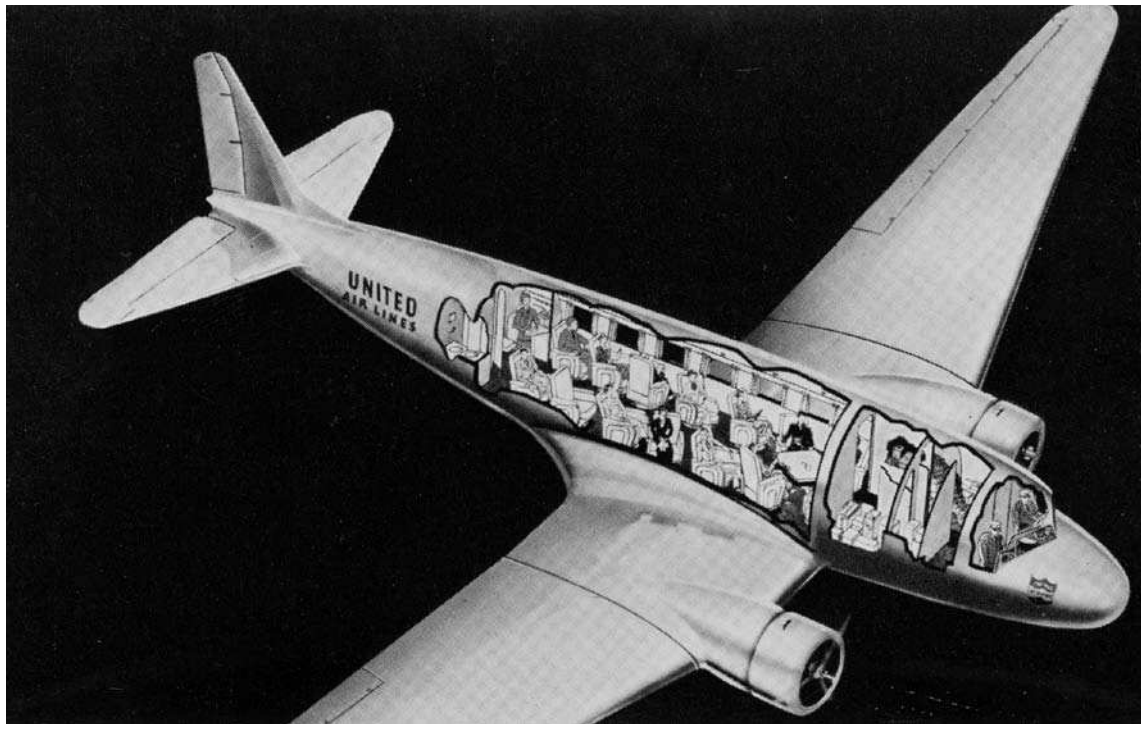
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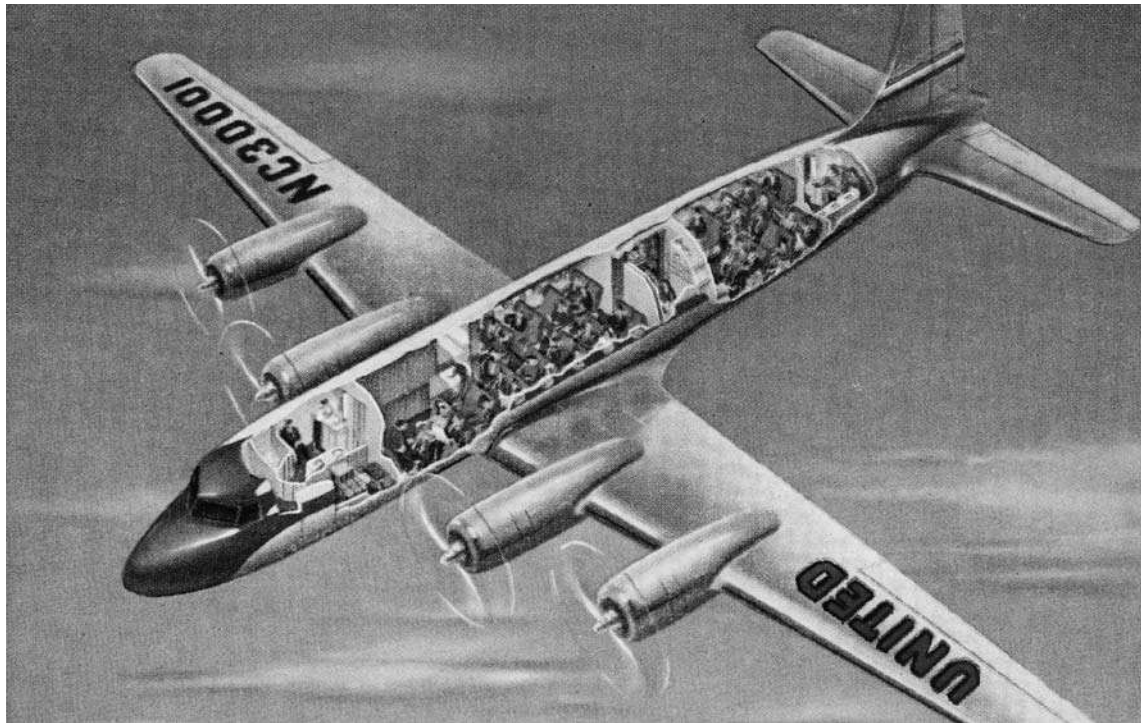


Fig. 1

James Langdon

A Eulogy for the Cutaway

The cutaway is a genre of images that provide a partial view inside an object for the purpose of revealing what it is made of and how it functions. The cutaway is distinguished from more comprehensive and diagrammatic forms of technical representation by its characteristic graphic device: the opening. The surface of a subject—its skin, bodywork, or other encasement—is selectively removed to show what it conceals. This method of visualization often places the cutaway in didactic contexts: cutaways are typically used to explain the internal structure of an object or some other phenomena.

The history of the cutaway spans several cultural registers. Significant works of Renaissance anatomy, such as Andreas Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), mark a period in which the cutaway offered the most advanced medical imaging in existence, rendered directly by skilled draftsmen from observation of pioneering dissections conducted by the work's author. By the mid twentieth century—arguably the genre's most productive period—the cutaway had become emblematic of the peculiarly boyish preoccupations of automobilia, comics, and advertising. The pages of countless comics and magazines—the British title *Eagle* (1950–69) being exemplary—featured beautiful illustrations that represent a fan culture enthralled by machines and science fiction.

The illustrated cutaway is presently in sharp decline, made redundant perhaps by the outputs of CAD (computer-aided design) software. Representations of designed objects from an infinite number of perspectives are routinely derived from the same digital information that will program the machines that manufacture these objects. Satisfying though this process is in its technical fidelity to an original design, what is lost is something of the artfulness of the cutaway. Graphic artists such as the "cutaway king" Yoshihiro Inomoto worked not only as technicians, but as enthusiasts.[1] Inomoto's pictures of powerful cars, loaded with implausible levels of detail, project an expression of love for the world of engineering and machines. Inomoto might exaggerate a powerful engine with scale and perspective, emphasizing a feeling for the car as an iconic object having meaning beyond its technical specifications.[2]

In the February 15, 1942, edition of the *Superman* newspaper strip, Superman's mortal alter ego Clark Kent takes an eye test.[3] X-ray vision allows him to mistakenly read—through the wall of the examination room in which he is seated—the eye chart in the adjacent room. He fails the test, and only later realizes why. The motif is familiar: superhuman insight is a paradox. The following compilation of cutaways is prompted by this episode. These are cutaways whose revelations are complicated, ironized, or paradoxical. These images don't reveal anything, or reveal the process of revelation itself. They reveal some other meaning than that which is obvious or intended and confound the functional didacticism of the genre.

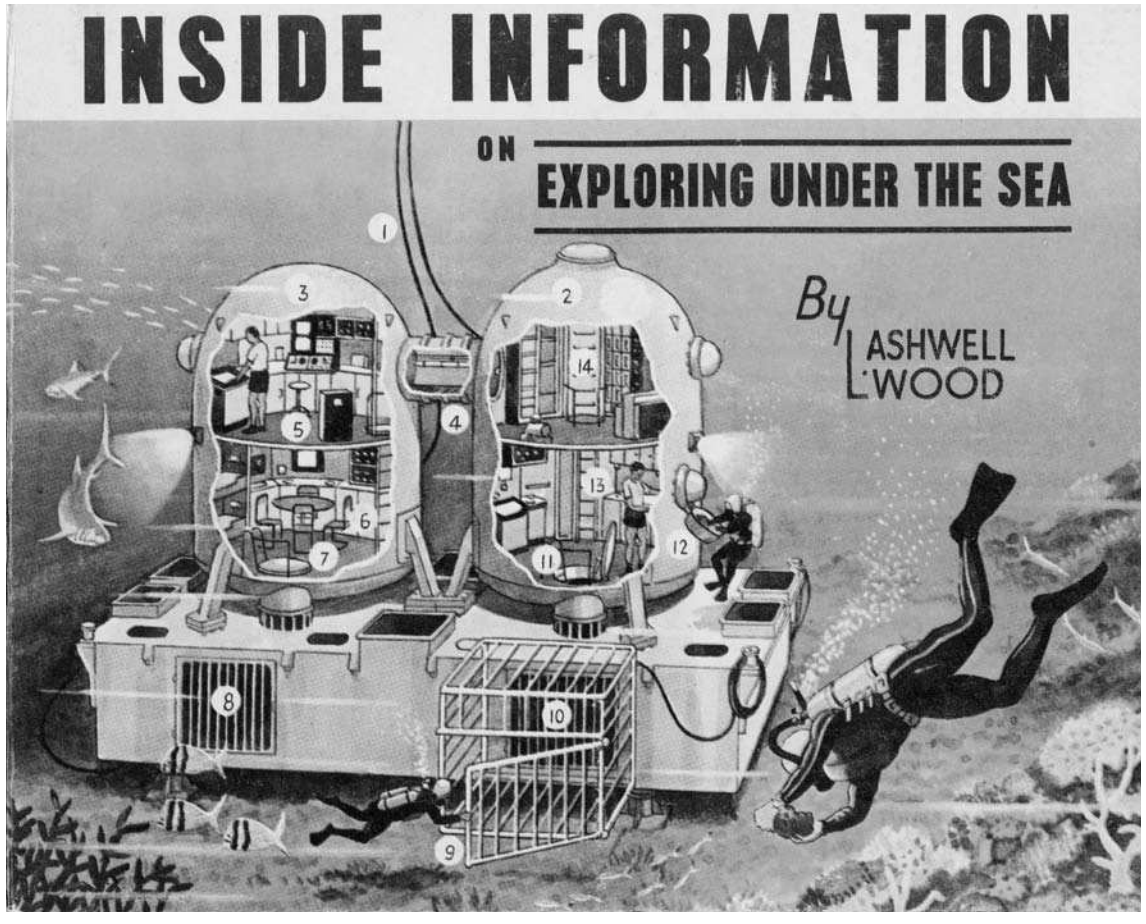

INSIDE INFORMATION
ON
EXPLORING UNDER THE SEA
By
ASHWELL
L'WOOD
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13
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Fig. 2

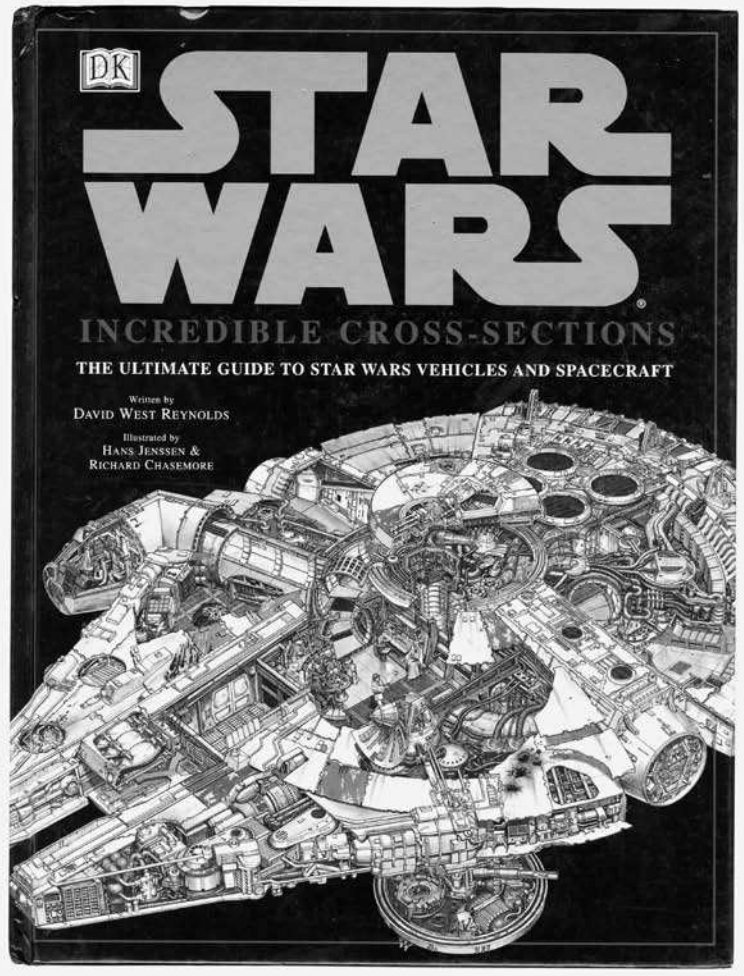

DK
STAR WARS
INCREDIBLE CROSS-SECTIONS
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO STAR WARS VEHICLES AND SPACECRAFT
Written by
DAVID WEST REYNOLDS
Illustrated by
HANS JENSSEN &
RICHARD CHASEMORE

Fig. 3

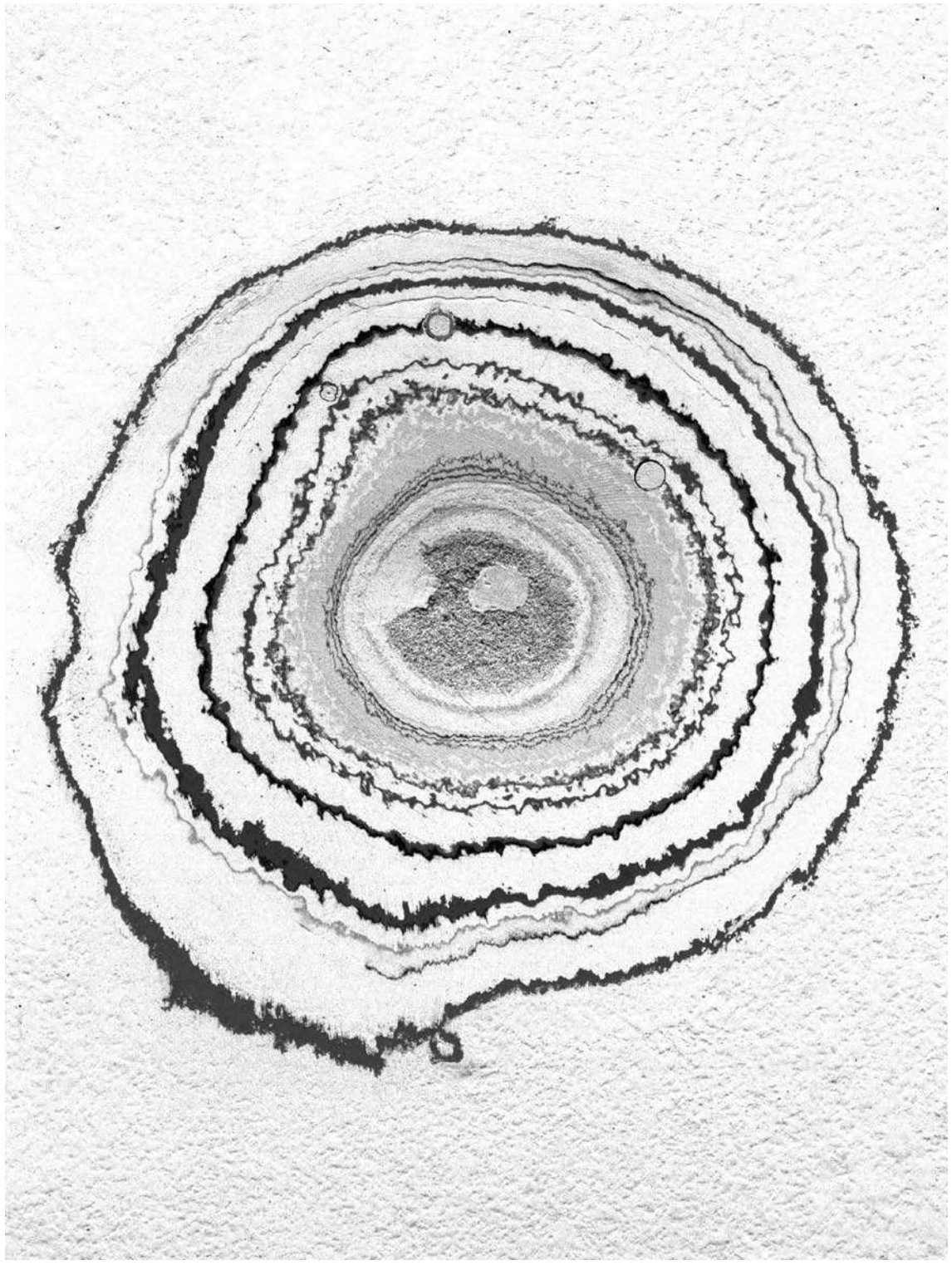


Fig. 4

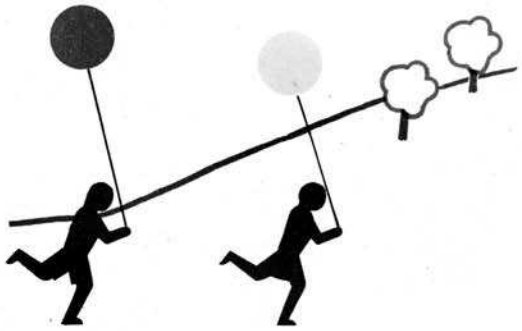


Fig. 5

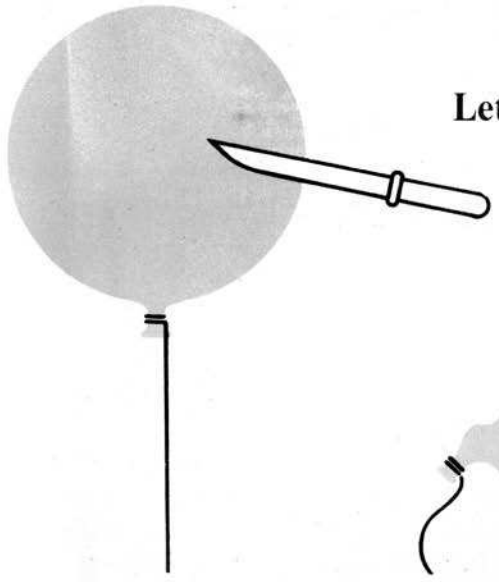


Fig. 6

Can we
see inside
a balloon?



Let's take a knife
and try.



Oh!



Fig. 7

Fig. 1
"These United Mainliners, built by Douglas, are the largest, most powerful, most luxurious transports in the US." So reads the message printed on the reverse of a typical mid-twentieth-century United Airlines promotional postcard. At the time of this card's original circulation, the conventions of the cutaway illustration were evidently embedded in the visual consciousness of the average American air traveller. The depiction of a passenger aircraft with large openings in its fuselage, set against a graphic black expanse that reads like a night sky, apparently appeared to the airline's customers as neither terrifying nor comic.

Fig. 2
Leslie Ashwell Wood authored and illustrated a number of publications under the series title *Inside Information* for his Benwig imprint in England in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Titles such as *Inside Information on World Car Speed Records* and *Inside Information on Tanks and Armoured Cars* (both 1971) are self-explanatory. Ashwell Wood typically illustrated his subjects not in graphic isolation, but set within their natural environments. In the didactic context of such publications, cutaways are so habitually and unconsciously decoded that perverse and impossible images are masked by the familiarity of this mode of graphic presentation. In *Inside Information on Exploring Under the Sea* (1971), the openings in an underwater scientific station do not appear to be disastrous but rather simply informative.

Fig. 3
From *Star Wars: Incredible Cross-sections* (1998) by David West Reynolds, illustrated by Hans Jenssen and Richard Chasemore. The illustrations contained in this publication project a wealth of meta-detail into the vehicles, weapons, and architecture of a fictional universe. Engines, electronics, and infrastructure—all either invented by the illustrators or derived from other examples—are shown in fine detail with comprehensive accounts of their operation provided in text. The subjects, such as the X-wing starfighter and the Death Star, have no actual contents to reveal. Instead these representations highlight and satisfy the hunger for the existence of such material.

Fig. 4
In Pierre Huyghe's *Timekeeper* (1999), the action of an orbital sander on a gallery wall at the Secession in Vienna (and again later at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis) uncovers the layering of paint during successive exhibition installations. The work is a physical enactment of the cutaway, but what is revealed is not a space behind the wall, but a multiplication of its surface. Considered in relation to the graphic language of the cutaway, this manual, tangible process confounds expectations. The wall resists the attempt to expose what it conceals, but a shift of attention to the nature of the surface itself occurs.

Fig. 5
Christopher Williams has made a series of photographs of demonstration camera lenses. This example is titled *Cutaway of a LEICA TRI-ELMAR-M 28-35-50 mm f/4 ASPH. Angle of view: Focal length 28 mm: 75°, 62°, 46° Focal length 35 mm: 63°, 54°, 38° Focal length 50 mm: 47°, 40°, 27° Optical design: 8 elements in 6 Aperture: f/4 [largest] f/22 [smallest] Scale: combined meter/feet-increments Leica M quick-change bayonet Focusing range: 1 m to Infinity Smallest object field: Focal length 28 mm: 750 × 1120 mm Focal length 35 mm: 620 × 930 mm Focal length 50 mm: 430 × 650 mm Highest reproduction ratio: Focal length 28 mm: 1:31 Focal length 35 mm: 1:26 Focal length 50 mm: 1:18 Lens produced between: 1998 and 2007 Date of the cut: unknown Fotostudio Axel Gnad, Düsseldorf February 13, 2009* (2009). (Courtesy Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne)

The subjects are sales tools devised by the manufacturers of these complex optical devices. These are factory-produced objects, prepared specifically for the purpose of demonstrating the ingenuity of their internal mechanisms. They are made and unmade with the same industrial precision. In Williams's photographs these cutaways are ironically imbued with the artist's characteristic impenetrable aesthetic. Under this scrutiny, they appear less explanatory than they probably did in the hands of a salesman. Williams layers visual cues, the cutaway lens, the archetypes of studio photography, and the austerity of display to the point where the cutaway's original explanatory function is obscured.

Fig. 6
In 1968, a block of high-rise flats at Ronan Point in Canning Town, London, collapsed. The collapse was caused by a domestic gas explosion in an eighteenth-floor flat that blew a hole in the side of the building and initiated a chain reaction of falling structural supports, which destroyed the southeast corner of the building and killed four occupants. The disaster has become an icon for the failures of postwar urban regeneration in England.

A documentary photograph published in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's report into the collapse (1968) reveals evidence of the flaws in two hidden structures: the inadequately engineered floor supports and the structure of institutional bureaucracy ultimately responsible for their design. The image plainly visualizes the weakness of these structures, but after the critical moment at which such insight could have prompted meaningful action to prevent the disaster. The action of cutting away in this instance is beyond control: destructive and literal.

Fig. 7
Marie Neurath's book for children *If you could see inside* (1949) employs the visual metaphor of a "magic knife" to rationalize a series of diagrammatic representations of objects of various scale and complexity: a volcano, a transport station, a house, an egg. In the book's final example both the subject—a yellow balloon—and the magic knife metaphor are playfully, yet meaningfully, burst.

About the Author

James Langdon is a graphic designer based in Birmingham, UK. He is one of six founding directors of Eastside Projects, an artist-run exhibition space.

Notes begin on page 153.

perspective and history, see Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).
33. The artist wrote: "to describe the Latin American situation with prevision, the closest thing would probably be one of those enormous rhizomic configurations that can go underground and span several (small) countries, popping up everywhere as what we visually identify as mushrooms. Each mushroom is seen as a single fruiting body, or whatever mushrooms are, but it is just one of many tips sprung from one entity that acts as fertile ground and a connecting web for all of them. There is no cause-effect link between the mushrooms; still, they are equal signs of the same thing." Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art*, 9.

Pages 94–102

James Langdon
A Eulogy for the Cutaway

1. Inomoto was described thus in *Road & Track* magazine, October 1997.
2. Kevin Hulsey, "The Automotive Artwork of Yoshihiro Inomoto," Automotive Illustration, 2011, http://fillip.ca/8poi.
3. The *Superman* strip was syndicated, appearing in many US national newspapers.

Pages 104–23

Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth
Documents Magazine, 1992–2004

1. *Heresies* was a feminist publication on art and politics, which produced twenty-seven issues between 1977 and 1993. All issues are available as PDFs, archived alongside other feminist projects at http://fillip.ca/6np4.

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