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The Arts of War: "Visual Presentation" and National Intelligence

Barry Katz

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The great conflicts that have scarred the twentieth century are rightly called "total" wars, but the meaning of this term has shifted over time. In the most obvious sense, the geographic scope of World Wars I and II was unprecedented: never had the soldiers of so many nations taken up arms, never had so much of the earth been aflame at once. The wars of the twentieth century have been "total" in another sense, however. Although warfare has never left noncombatant populations unscathed, the logistics of permanent mobilization—the condition described by the French urbanist Paul Virilio as "pure war"[1]—have drawn upon industry, science, agriculture, education, medicine, and other spheres of civilian life to a wholly unprecedented degree. That war in the nuclear age threatens to be total in yet another sense is a truism that requires no elaboration.

This essay concerns the mobilization of the artistic community during World War II, not as expressed in the outraged imagery of a *Guernica* or a Heartfield montage, but through the direct recruitment of the applied arts—architecture, industrial design, and graphic design—by the Office of Strategic Services, America's wartime intelligence agency. The artists drawn into the "Presentation Branch" of OSS entered the secret war with boundless enthusiasm, a determination to support the anti-Fascist campaign, and —like most other units of the fledgling intelligence service—no particular idea of how they were supposed to do it. Their early campaigns reveal the bravado of infinite possibilities. Gradually, as their ambitions became adjusted to reality, a series of theoretical principles evolved which enabled them to apply the *scienza nuova* of design to the ancient art of war. Through their pioneering experiments in the visual display of information in the propaganda war, in service of the War Crimes trials at Nuremberg and, finally, in the waning months of the organization, in preparation for the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco; they left a small but indelible mark on history. Armed with this extraordinary wartime experience, they went on to make a much larger mark on their respective professions.

The contentious history of the Presentation Branch offers a compelling insight into the politics of both art and intelligence. We begin by recalling the situation that prevailed at the beginning of the war.

1 Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War,* trans. by Polizzottti (N.Y.: Semiotext(e) 1983); and Virilio, *War and Cinema. The Logistics of Perception,* trans. by Camiller, (London, Verso 1989).

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1. The Office of Strategic Services

Overtaken by events, the United States found itself at the onset of the Second World War wholly unprepared in the field of intelligence. The Army and Navy maintained their separate military intelligence branches, the FBI dutifully carried out domestic surveillance, and a dozen other agencies conducted information-gathering activities of various sorts. No centralized intelligence service existed, however, that was capable of operating on the same level of professionalism as the British SOE, the Soviet NKVD, or the German *Sicherheitsdienst*. This failure has been explained by the legacy of post-Wilsonian isolationism; by a populist fear of an invasive secret police apparatus; and even by the patrician etiquette that dictated that "gentlemen do not read other people's mail."

Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor put an end to American innocence, President Roosevelt had taken the first steps to redress this deficiency. In mid-1940, he asked his friend, William J. Donovan, to undertake a series of overseas missions to assess the military situation and to evaluate American intelligence needs in what was shaping up to be a war of global proportions. On July 11, 1941, the President accepted Donovan's recommendation that a "Service of Strategic Information" be created, and designated him the nation's first Coordinator of Information.[2]

Donovan's charge, in the terms of the Executive Order that created the COI, was "to collect, analyze, and correlate information and data which may bear upon national security," and to make this information available to the President and the Joint Chiefs. Donovan accepted this mission with alacrity and, in its first months, the Coordinator's office grew rapidly, claiming for itself the functions not only of intelligence-gathering and analysis but of espionage, propaganda, subversion, and postwar planning. His expansive vision soon ran up against the claims of more established Washington bureaucracies and, after a year of bitter jurisdictional rivalries, the agency was surgically dismembered. The overt propaganda activities of the COI were reorganized as the Office of War Information, and its secret functions, restructured along regional and functional lines, became the Office of Strategic Services.[3] Although Americans had been engaged in clandestine operations from the time when Nathan Hale disguised himself as a schoolmaster and slipped behind British lines on Long Island, this may be considered the founding of the nation's intelligence establishment.

Having virtually no precedent on which to build, the early history of OSS is that of an organization inventing itself. With remarkable boldness, Donovan recruited New Deal economists from Washington, Marxist philosophers from the German refugee community, socialite adventurers from the Ivy League; and a motley assortment of American labor activists, European Social Democrats, White Russian monarchists, and some two-hundred and fifty veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. "I'd put Stalin, himself, on the

2 The official documents pertaining to the creation of the COI and OSS—Donovan's "Memorandum of Establishment of Service of Strategic Information" (June 10, 1941); the Presidential Order "Designating a Coordinator of Information" (June 11, 1941); and the "Military Order of June 13, 1942" creating the Office of Strategic Services—are reproduced as Appendices B, C and E, respectively, to Thomas F. Troy, *Donovan and the CIA* (Frederick, Md.: Aletheia 1981).

3 For general studies of the OSS, see also Bradley F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors. OSS and the Origins of the CIA* (N.Y.: Basic Books 1983); Anthony Cave Brown, *The Last Hero. Wild Bill Donovan* (N.Y.: Times Books 1982); and Thomas F. Troy, *Donovan*. There is a vast literature on OSS overseas operations: for perspectives on the lesser-known Washington-based intelligence activities, see Barry M. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence. Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services, 1942-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1989), and Robin Winks, *Cloak and Gown. Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (N.Y., 1987).

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OSS payroll if I thought it would help defeat Hitler," quipped the Republican Donovan in an unguarded moment. His wildly unorthodox conception of modern warfare led him, finally, into the shadowy underworld of art, architecture and design.

2. "One Picture Worth a Thousand Words"

Despite the legends that have engulfed him, Donovan was the first to admit, as he put it somewhat crudely after the war, that the real world of intelligence is not about the "seductive blonde" or the "phony mustache," but about *information:* its collection, evaluation, and—the final link in the intelligence chain—its timely presentation to the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The torrent of raw data that flowed into Washington on a daily basis from all theaters of the war lent a particular urgency and complexity to this latter task.

Influenced by the slick persuasiveness of commercial advertising, Donovan had, in his civilian law practice, frequently supported his arguments with arresting visual devices. Behind the battle cry, "One picture is worth a thousand words," he vigorously promoted these practices in his new position as Coordinator of Information. Knowing that the President would be the focal point of an inconceivable volume of information, he allocated a remarkable 24.9 percent of his first annual budget toward the design of visual presentations. How could the latest techniques be applied so as to enable the President to absorb, in a one- or two-hour, multi-media briefing session, masses of intelligence data that, in written form, might take months to assimilate?

Responsibility for this program fell to Donovan's deputy director, Col. Atherton Richards, a Hawaiian pineapple magnate who had been impressed by the bravado of the industrial designers whose visual pyrotechnics he had seen at the New York World's Fair. By September 1941, Richards already was imagining some kind of "a semi-permanent exhibit, which would dramatize the elements involved in U.S. national defense."[4] For creative energy, he enlisted the aid of Merian C. Cooper, one of the first Hollywood producers to experiment successfully with the documentary film, and who now was a captain attached to Army Intelligence.[5] Between them, an idea took shape for an autonomous "Visual Presentation" unit. One section of it would be made up of a detachment of Hollywood technicians that had been raised by filmmaker John Ford and secured intact by Donovan's organization. The other was to be a state-of-the-art facility, staffed by a team of artists engineers, and design professionals, that would provide the President with "a panorama of concentrated information" at any hour of the day or night.[6]

Having had the opportunity to tour the British War Situation Room, Cooper proposed that a comparable installation be constructed under the White House. Outfitted with the latest electrical, mechanical and photographic gadgetry; and dominated by an immense

4 "The Rise and Fall of O-2." R[ecord] G[roup] 226, Entry 99, Box 102, File 815, p. 105. See "A Note on Sources."

5 Cooper was something of an adventurer and OSS found him clearly in his element. His most famous documentaries were *Grass* (1925), filmed on location in the mountains of Persia; and *Chang* (1926), filmed in the jungles of Siam. His most celebrated feature was *King Kong* (1933).

6 "Presentation History," RG 226, Entry 99, Box 76, File 44a.

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illuminated globe on which could be projected everything from weather fronts and oil fields to the disposition of land, air and naval forces; the proposed Situation Room would present a flexible, comprehensive, and continually updated picture of the war. Within a few months, the idea had grown from a couple of rooms into a top-secret, windowless building that became known by the intimidating code name "Q-2." Donovan personally recruited a Technical Advisory Committee of prominent industrialists: "I cannot be very explicit by letter," he teased them, "but the invention and device of this room is of the utmost importance in the national effort."[7] That it also would assure him of a private channel to the President was never far from his mind.

This grandiose scheme set in motion an alliance, which was sustained throughout the war, between the infant intelligence profession and the only slightly older profession of industrial design. In search of "the inventive genius and the technical creativeness of the country's best engineers and industrial designers,"[8] negotiations were opened with the offices of Raymond Loewy, Walter Dorwin Teague, and Henry Dreyfuss who, flushed with their triumphs at the 1939 World's Fair, signed on as Expert Consultants in September. The visionary Norman Bel Geddes was taken on only when the job was fairly well-defined "so that Geddes wouldn't start moving mountains."[9] They would be joined, at this early stage, by the inventive Buckminster Fuller, and architects Louis Kahn and Bertrand Goldberg, each of whom had been experimenting with prefabricated, mass-produced housing units.[10] Lewis Mumford, fresh from the anti-isolationist polemics of the day and anxious to play some part in the war, contributed his ideas, as did his friend, Lee Simonson, the theatrical designer; as well as the greatest visual communicator of them all, Walt Elias Disney. The language of theatricality—not surprisingly—pervaded their far-reaching discussions.[11]

In an unusual collaborative effort, Loewy, Teague and Dreyfuss worked out a complicated division of labor and, billing the government at only half the exorbitant rates usually charged to commercial clients, set their staffs to work on what was confidently expected to become "the hub of the Allied war effort."[12] By early November, sketches and a scale model of the wheelchair-accessible building were presented to the President, who gave his immediate and unqualified approval, and allocated one million dollars from his special funds toward its realization. The place of the designers in the intelligence war seemed assured when a set of preliminary blueprints came to the attention of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who eagerly ordered two such rooms outfitted for their own headquarters on Constitution Avenue.[13] Jolted by the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941, the Bureau of the Budget authorized the remaining two million dollars to start construction on the building, and the

7 Donovan to Dr. Herbert Kalmus [President, Technicolor Company], C. F. Kettering [Vice President, General Motors], O. G. Buckley [President, Bell Telephone Laboratories], and Dr. E. C. K. Meese [Vice-President, Eastman Kodak]: RG 226, Entry 144, Box 48, File 364. The proposed building was to be erected on a sloping site adjoining OSS's existing "Q" Building—hence its name. A contemporary report, "The War in Pictures," appeared in the *New York Times*, October 8, 1941.

8 "The Rise and Fall of Q-2," loc. cit., p. 111.

9 Harry Sims Bent to Atherton Richards, "Services of the Designers" (April 29, 1942): RG 226, Entry 144, Box 49, File 369, and C. T. Coiner to Harry Batten (August 29, 1941): File 370.

10 See David Brownlee, et al., *Louis Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* (Los Angeles: Rizzoli 1991), 27-32; Michel Ragon, *Goldberg dans la ville* (Paris: Paris Art Center 1985), 210–11; and Donald Albrecht, ed., *World War II and the American Dream* (Washington, D.C.: National building Museum 1995).11. "History of Presentation in OSS" (Preliminary Draft), p. 1A: RG 226, Entry 99, Box 102, File 815. The documents from this period speak of "theatre rooms" in which "daily performances" would be "staged" for the President in order to "dramatize" the course of the war. A few documents pertaining to Lewis Mumford's consultancy, from June 2, 1942 to March 20, 1943, are included among the Mumford papers at the Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Bertrand Goldberg provided additional information in the course of a stimulating interview in Chicago, on January 10, 1995.

12 [Assistant Chief] Armitage Watkins to the Bureau of the Budget (May 12, 1942): RG 226, Entry 144, Box 48, File 367. The arrangement is outlined in a memorandum from Henry Dreyfuss, Raymond Loewy and Walter Dorwin Teague to W. E. Reynolds, Commissioner of Public Buildings (n.d., but after mid-September 1941): RG 226, Entry 144, Box 49, File 370. Bauhaus designer Herbert Bayer also was considered at this time.

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concept of visual presentation was poised, in the words of one optimistic report, to achieve "a grandiose fulfillment."

The euphoria came to an abrupt halt with the reorganization that brought OSS under the jurisdiction of the Joint Chiefs, who decided that the facilities already designed for them would, in fact, be sufficient. The planned building—with its "epidiascopes" and "stereomotographs;" its Variable-Speed Statistical Visualizer and three-dimensional terrain models; and its segmented semi-transparent screens and "projection animator," that could be blindered for top-secret screenings so that not even the projectionist could see what was being shown—was never built.[14] With the indefinite suspension of what was, in effect, its *raison d'être*, the Visual Presentation Branch, in the words of an internal memorandum, "fell apart like a shattered empire."[15]

3. Toward a Philosophy of Presentation

The collapse of the fantasy world of Q-2 was to have a sobering effect upon the designers but, far from undoing them, it was really during this period that a rigorous "philosophy of presentation" began to take shape within OSS. It was hammered out, amid a welter of political and methodological controversies, by an ambitious team of young design professionals who had converged upon to Washington from every quarter. Their advance to the front lines of the intelligence war more than compensated for the retreat of the celebrities who had recruited them.

13 The facilities as actually constructed for the Joint Chiefs are described in a restricted pamphlet, "Some Facts about the Presentation Room in the Combined Chiefs of Staff Building" (Washington, D.C., 1943): papers of Oliver Lundquist.

14 The Epidiascope was a device for projecting opaque originals onto a screen; the Statistical Visualizer indicated quantitative relationships through panels of vertical lights; and the Stereomotograph was a drum-type, automatic slide projector.

15 "The Rise and Fall of Q-2," p. 140; "Presentation History," RG 226, Entry 99, Box 76, File 44A. Most of the technical work on Q-2 was done by Henry Dreyfuss, whose office produced two sets of detailed blueprints preserved in the archives of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum (New York): uncatalogued microfilm, Henry Dreyfuss collection.

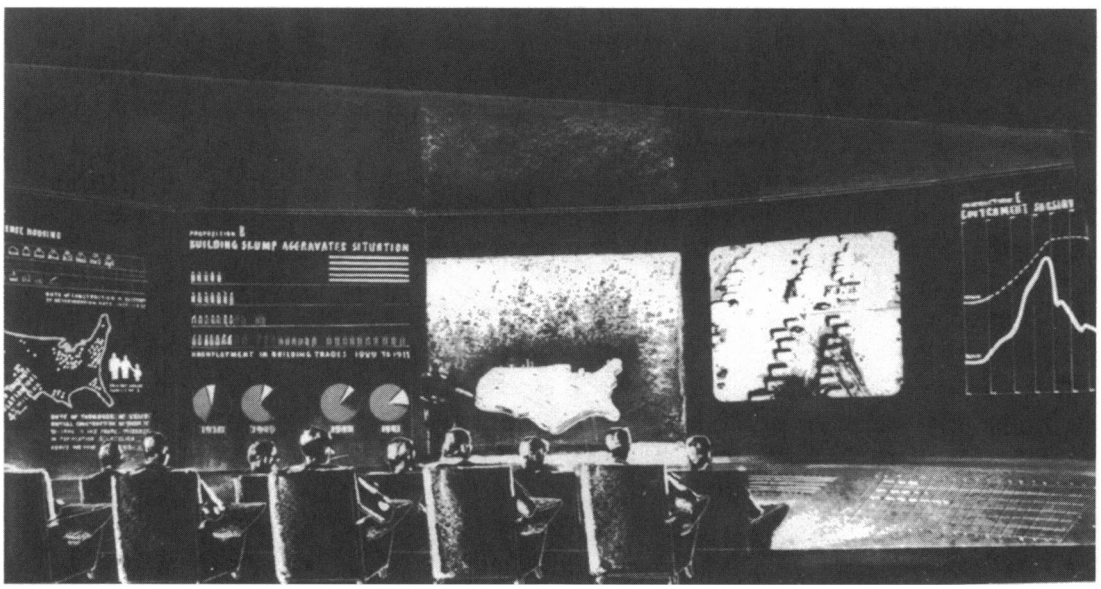

Figure 1
Presidential War Situation Room as envisioned by the Visual Presentation Branch. The office of Henry Dreyfuss was primarily responsible for this fantastic plan.

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In *Never Leave Well Enough Alone*, that masterpiece of unabashed self-aggrandizement, Raymond Loewy recalled how, when the war broke out, he loaned Donovan "one of my most brilliant young men [who] became one of the top men in the Department of Visual Presentation."[16] Allowing for Loewy's preposterous claim that the Branch was "one of the most secret and important components in the strategical planning of the war," the offices of the celebrity designers were, indeed, among the most important channels by which artistic talent flowed into the emerging intelligence community.

The "brilliant young man" whom Loewy did not trouble to name was Oliver Lundquist, a prize-winning architecture student at NYU and Columbia who had been working for Loewy as a specialist in industrial and product design. Lundquist began to do consulting work for COI during the summer of 1941, and moved to Washington on a full-time basis in October. His first assignment was to design statistical charts reflecting Soviet economic capabilities. This seemingly mundane task proved to be a key element in the

16 Raymond Loewy, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone* (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster 1951), 150. Despite some genuinely important projects, Loewy seems to have regarded his enduring contribution to the war effort as being a swivel cardboard lipstick container designed without the use of critical war metals "to help maintain the morale of the American woman," and thus of men: Loewy, *Industrial Design* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook 1979), 52. See also Arthur Pulos, *The American Design Adventure* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1988), pp. 20–22.

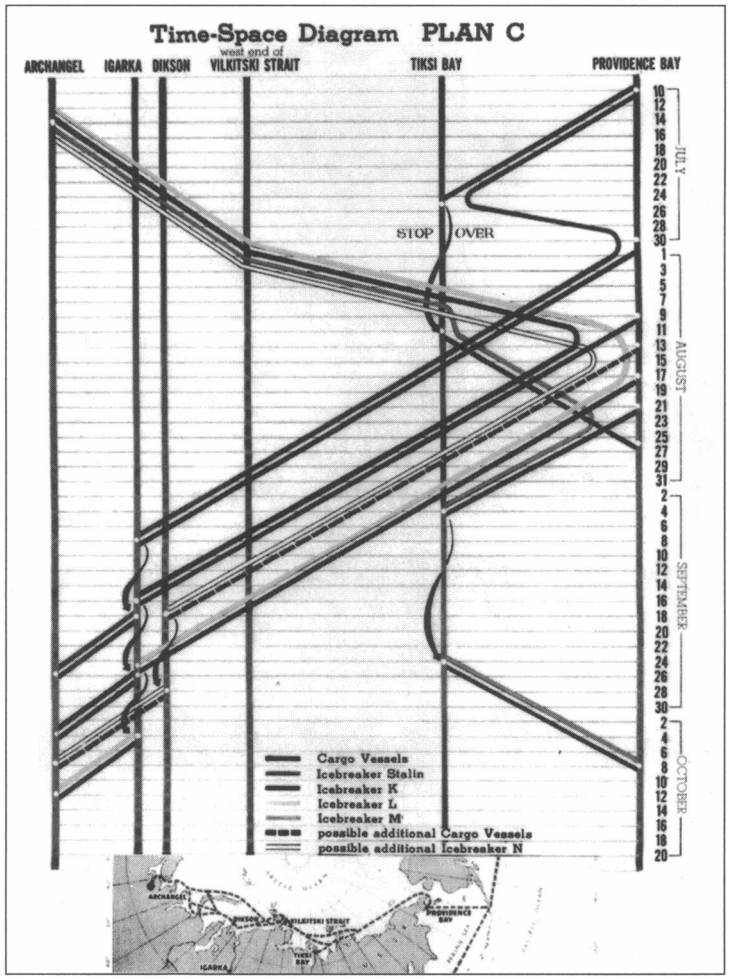

Figure 2
Time-Space diagram of supply routes to Russian ports, prepared by Oliver Lundquist. An example of the innovative graphics devised in the Visual Presentation Branch.

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decision to continue the Lend-Lease program in the face of conventional military wisdom that held that a German victory in Russia was inevitable. It also suggests the imaginative approach that OSS applied to the new art of "envisioning information."[17]

Shortly thereafter, another architect, Donal McLaughlin, left the artful world of the New York designers for the more sober demands of a world at war. A product of NYU, the Beaux-Arts Institute and Yale, McLaughlin had worked with Teague on exhibits and dioramas for the 1939 World's Fair. He was doing shops and department store interiors at Loewy's when he was abruptly reassigned to the secret War Room project. In the spring of 1942, McLaughlin moved to Washington and became Chief of the Graphic Section of the Visual Presentation Branch. Over the next three years, he built up a team of artists who illustrated film reports; drew charts, graphs and maps; prepared technical illustrations of secret devices and weapons; made propaganda sketches, caricatures and forgeries; and more.

They were followed by a growing staff—114 in all by the end of the war—of architects, industrial designers, artists, editors, illustrators, engineers, machinists, photographers, filmmakers, composers, economists, cartographers, psychologists, and even a historian. Eero Saarinen, already one of the most daring architects of his generation, had been smarting over the cancellation of a gigantic General Motors research center for which he had the contract—and from the arrival of his draft notice—when he received a call from his former Yale classmate, McLaughlin. In OSS, Saarinen became Chief of the Special Exhibits Division, with responsibility for all three-dimensional projects. Jo Mielziner; who by 1942 had designed more than 150 stage settings for New York theater, opera and ballet productions; became Chief of the Design Section. Walt Disney sent over a couple of animators; and the editor of the Viking Press, David Zablodowsky, came on board to direct the Editorial Section.

Other people were drawn into the organization at early stages of careers that would blossom after the war, often on the basis of the multidisciplinary, multimedia hothouse experience of OSS. Edna Andrade went from graphics work in OSS to a successful career in the Philadelphia art world; and Alice Provensen as creator of the popular Golden Books series. Dan Kiley became one of the most celebrated figures in the modernist tradition of American landscape architecture. And Benjamin Thompson, who eventually would be awarded the coveted AIA Gold Medal for his campaigns to reinvigorate the urban life of Boston (Faneuil Hall), New York (Fulton Street Market), Baltimore (Harborplace),and Washington, D.C. (Union Station), acknowledged that the models and simulations he built during the war formed the basis of his later ideas about design and the communication of space and form.

Nor was this all. Georg Olden, who dropped out of art school to join the Presentation Branch, went on to become Art

17 The phrase belongs to Edward Tufte and his near-classic books, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press 1983) and *Envisioning Information* (Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press 1990).

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Director for CBS and is recognized as the first African-American to break through the color bar into the world of graphic design. Robert Konikow was drafted into OSS with a background in mathematics, but his experience in the Editorial Section redirected him into the world of communications and a distinguished career in the field of Exhibition Design. Paul Child was transferred from the Graphics Section in Washington to the OSS Outpost in Ceylon, where he prepared maps and other visual displays for the Far Eastern Theater. On the porch of a tea planter's bungalow he met—and later married—fellow OSS officer Julia McWilliams. Reassigned to the OSS outpost in Chunking, they acquired a taste for Chinese cuisine and, in postwar Paris, Paul and Julia Child mastered the art of French cooking.[18]

Overseeing this unruly gathering of creative energy were two economists, Hubert C. Barton and his deputy chief, Carl Marzani, who became the focus of some of the more scurrilous of the charges that were later directed against the agency. Barton's long-standing interest in the design of visual communications had evolved during his tenure as an economic statistician at the Federal Reserve Board. Economists had arrived in Washington only with the coming of the New Deal, and Barton soon recognized that a great deal of their work was being wasted for the simple reason of its unintelligibility outside their own charmed circle of professionals. By the beginning of the war, he had built a reputation around his campaign to bridge the gulf "between those who had the facts and knew their meaning, and those who needed the facts as a basis for decision and action."[19]

Barton's route into the COI/OSS was typical of the face-to-face network through which America's first intelligence service acquired its first generation of agents and analysts. His chief at the Federal Reserve had been Emile Despres, a theorist of acknowledged brilliance who moved to the COI in the summer of 1941, and immediately began to lure some of the nation's most gifted economists into the agency's Research and Analysis Branch (R&A). Barton—famous for his meticulous precision—was the obvious choice to serve as liaison between R&A and the proposed Visual Presentation project, and he spent much of his first year promoting his ideas for "constructive innovation" in the presentation of intelligence data.[20] In August 1942, this wily administrator became Chief of the "Presentation Division" of the newly-reorganized OSS. Barton, together with his administrative assistant (and later wife), Marie Grammer; his deputy chief, Marzani; and the creative triumvirate of Lundquist, McLaughlin and Zablodowsky; formed the intellectual center of the division. Internally, it operated as "a congenial gang of brains, good humor and progressive orientation."[21] When dealing with the outer world, however, their heads were often "wreathed in clouds of polemic and dispute.[22]

18 Profiles of senior Presentation Branch officers are found in RG 226, Entry 85, Box 102, File 815. On Georg Olden, see the appreciation by Julie Lasky in *Print* (March-April, 1994): 21–4. Benjamin Thompson generously provided me with sections of his unfinished autobiographical memoir. Edna Andrade, Julia Child, Robert Konikow, Oliver Lundquist, and Donal McLaughin contributed further details contained in this section.

19 Hubert C. Barton, "Response to State Department Accusations in February of 1947." I am grateful to Marie Barton for providing this transcript. It is useful to recall that economists entered the government in appreciable numbers only in the 1930s, and their theories and methods were still largely unknown.

20 H. C. Barton to [Edward] Mason and [Emile] Despres, "Plan for Visual Presentation of Economic Data" (November 26, 1941): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 18, File 333.

21 Carl Marzani, *The Education of a Reluctant Radical*, IV: 111. The author generously permitted me to see this volume of his memoirs in typescript a few months before his death in 1994.

22 "The Rise and Fall of Q-2," loc. cit., p. 106.

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4. The Politics of Information

Over the course of the war the OSS design team endured a series of administrative reorganizations. This would make for a tedious tale of bureaucratic intrigue were it not for the fact that each was occasioned by a substantive ideological controversy—some surprisingly bitter—over the nature of design and its role in the intelligence war. As in other theaters of operation, it was through the resolution of these conflicts that new and untested ideas were proposed, and theories took shape that would be conveyed into the postwar professional world. The theory of presentation took shape, in effect, in four chronological stages.

November 1941–June 1942: Visual Presentation under the COI

The Visual Presentation Branch was formally constituted in November 1941. Atherton Richards served as its first chief, and the documents of those halcyon days refer unabashedly to "the fun and adventure of adjusting oneself to unfamiliar and emergency conditions."[23] Still intoxicated by their newly-won celebrity, the consultant designers spared neither effort nor expense in proposing extravagant futuristic displays; and Richards was advised to tread carefully so as not to disturb the "delicate balance of cooperation" that bound the artists to the generals in a common effort.

The first battle fought by the fledgling Visual Presentation Branch—and the one on which its survival ultimately depended—concerned the intellectual validity of nonverbal symbols in the communication of information. As commonplace as they may be today, the techniques proposed by the designers—illustrated reports, graphics, three-dimensional exhibits, animated motion pictures—represented an extreme departure from conventional reporting. Barton had campaigned for two years just to get the Federal Reserve Board to introduce *color* into its tables, and it was necessary now to establish the power of the image as a weapon of war.

Members of the agency's Research & Analysis Branch in particular—an outstanding unit whose academic dignitaries included five future presidents of the American Economic Association, seven future presidents of the American Historical Association, three founding members of the Frankfurt School, and a pair of Nobel laureates-in-waiting—were responsible for substantive analytical reporting, and often could not fathom the need for what they regarded as gratuitous visual embellishment. Drawing upon his professional training for a suitable metaphor, Oliver Lundquist characterized the dispute between the "academicians" of R&A and the "showmen" of the Presentation Branch in architectural terms: "On the one hand, the artist was trying to design and build a house without materials for a client who didn't particularly want one. On the other hand, the [academician] was trying to build a house for the same unreceptive client without hiring an architect."[24]

23 Ibid., p. 118.

24 Oliver Lundquist to H. C. Barton (January 20, 1944): RG 226, Entry 85,Box 102, File 815.

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It hardly mattered, however, as plans for the three-million dollar building neared completion, and the designers continued their fearless march from World's Fair to World War.

August 1942–July 1943: The Presentation Division Under R&A

On August 1, 1942, as part of the radical restructuring that created the streamlined Office of Strategic Services, an official order resolved the conflict between "showmen" and "academicians" by merging Presentation with the Research and Analysis Branch, the principal "intelligence" arm of OSS. This reorganization, necessitated by the sudden cancellation of the "Q-2" building, put an end to the era of fantastic gadgetry, and forced the unit to channel its resources into a rigorous theory of presentation.

The key figure in this program was certainly Hubert ("Hu") Barton, the first to recognize the potential for integrating visual devices into the process, and not merely the end product, of research. Barton inherited the remnants of the Presentation Branch and remained Chief, through its various reorganizations, for the duration of the war. His fundamental commitment was not to the use of graphics per se, but to the communication of *ideas*. Under his leadership a concept emerged: "Presentation is the selection, production and use of whatever medium or combination of media will transmit most effectively a particular body of facts to a particular audience."[25] That the essence of presentation was not primarily graphic or even visual, but *intellectual*, became evident in the second controversy to test the unit.

In pursuit of its mission (and of a clientele that would justify its existence), the Presentation Division ventured into the world of film and animation. Its first product was an experimental, one-reel motion picture report; consisting mostly of animated charts; on the status of *U.S. Wartime Manpower:* How could the nation pull an estimated twelve million men out of the civilian workforce *and* increase production? The film—one of the first attempts ever to portray dynamic statistics by motion picture rather than by a static chart—was so successful in its rendering of complex demographic data that it came to the attention of Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall. Marshall promptly commissioned the OSS to create a presentation on the structure of the U.S. Army, which had grown from several hundred thousand to a fighting force of two million since the beginning of the war. At a meeting with Marshall's deputy chief, attended by Carl Marzani of OSS and Hollywood's Darryl F. Zanuck (then a well-tailored colonel in the Army Signal Corps), the Presentation Branch proposed a film format to include animation and live action. Zanuck scoffed that such a production would take the better part of a year, but *one month later* the five-reel film, *Organization of the Army*, was ready for its first screening. On the basis of its positive reception, Marshall ordered that it become the

25 "Proposed State Department Presentation Division" (February 1, 1945): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 25, File 413. It was at this juncture that the name of the unit was changed from "Visual Presentation" to "Presentation."

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basic army orientation film shown to all new recruits, and the Presentation Branch—and, for that matter, OSS—were on the map.

The unexpected success of this naive foray into the movie business brought the Presentation Branch into a bitter confrontation with the professionals in John Ford's Field Photographic Unit. On his own initiative, Ford had mobilized a unit of film technicians to undertake strategic reporting even before the outbreak of the war—the days, in the vintage Hollywood prose of one of his scriptwriters, when "Washington, the nodding head of a drowsing eagle, dozed fitfully."[26] With the dramatic success of his documentary, *The Battle of Midway*, only barely behind him, Ford clearly believed—as did the consultant designers—that his industry had a contribution to make to the war but on its own terms. When it came to making films, one of his closest associates acknowledged, Ford felt that "OSS was no different than Twentieth Century-Fox."[27]

To the Presentation Branch, however, Washington differed very much from Hollywood. According to the concept Barton and his colleagues were developing, the motion picture was not a privileged medium but one tool among many with which to represent ideas and information. A rapprochement might have been achieved, since the Field Photographic Branch tended to be concerned with newsreel-type combat footage, whereas Presentation was interested in analytical films on problems of a more abstract nature. Unfortunately, Ford had brought a complete movie studio over which he exercised total control with him to Washington and his staff did not shrink from stealing its own equipment in order to deny access to his rivals. The standoff was resolved by administrative decree when the Presentation Division was unexpectedly transferred to Ford's Field Photographic Unit.

July, 1943–May, 1944: Presentation Under Field Photographic

This arrangement actually worked only because of the mutual hostility that had grown up between the enthusiastic but cinematically inexperienced designers and the professional moviemakers, who had faint interest in problems of statistical analysis. Although committed to technically finished productions, the Presentation Division began with the premise that content was more important than form; that the media should be selected to suit the material in question; and that cinematographic techniques must never subordinate the basic idea the film was intended to convey: "We do not want or need to make 'great' motion pictures in the Hollywood sense of the word," one of Presentation's graphic artists observed pointedly. Even during the war Ford was receiving accolades from the Motion Picture Academy while, in Presentation, it was felt that the money and time expended by OSS in producing prize-winning films of the *Midway* and *December 7* variety "should have been put into analytical and official work which would have benefited OSS in the prosecution of the war."[28]

26 History of Field Photographic Branch: RG 226, Entry 99, Box 94, File 5. Ford's years with OSS are colorfully narrated by his grandson Dan Ford in *Pappy. The Life of John Ford* (N.Y.: Prentice-Hall 1979), 162-203. See also Andrew Sinclair, *John Ford* (N.Y.: Dial Press 1979), 106–125, and Tag Gallagher, *John Ford. The Man and his Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1986), 199–219.

27 Robert Parrish (Field Photographic Unit), quoted in Dan Ford, 164.

28 Oliver Lundquist to H. C. Barton (January 20, 1944): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 102, File 815.

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Ford, for his part, found the Presentation Division to be full of amateurs, interlopers and Communists; and a *modus vivendi* was achieved only when each group was given a clearly delimited terrain. It was, in fact, during this period that the designers did some of their most effective work. Having proven itself in the *Manpower* and *Army* films, Presentation found its services in constant demand, and productions followed on everything from the state of German morale to Edna Andrade's animations of the detonator mechanism for an explosive fountain pen, to training manuals on underwater operations.

The event that pressed the Presentation team to begin to consolidate its various newfound specialties occurred in the fall of 1943. The War Department, concerned that the public not succumb to its own optimistic propaganda, announced a two-day conference to be held in the fifth floor auditorium of the new Pentagon building in which the urgency of the military situation would be presented to some two hundred and fifty leading representatives of industry, labor and the press. The OSS Presentation Division was asked to organize the event and, during the month of September, assumed responsibility for all of the two- and three-dimensional support: McLaughlin's Graphic Section created fifty-eight charts to illustrate the speeches of Generals Marshall and Arnold; Saarinen's Exhibits team built a model Situation Room, and outfitted it with maps, terrain models and other displays; slides, animations and motion pictures were developed; and Lundquist took charge of "stage managing" the entire production, "since it became evident that not enough thought had been given to this very important element of successful presentation."[29] The War Department conference provided the Division with its first large-scale opportunity to realize Barton's theories in a single, coordinated presentation that utilized all visual media to facilitate the delivery of a vast body of technical information. The hugely successful conference was repeated to different audiences over the next several months—including a joint session of Congress—and the Presentation Division found itself swamped with requests.

5. Visualizing War and Peace

The successful implementation of the emergent theory of presentation seems, if anything, to have heightened tensions between the designers and the filmmakers, and ultimately it became necessary for General Donovan, himself, to intervene. Barton had from the beginning resisted all tendencies to have his iconoclastic unit pigeonholed: "To me," he appealed to Donovan, "presentation is a whole set of techniques (for movies, conferences, graphics, reports, speeches, situation rooms, brochures, etc.) focused on a single objective. The objective is to convey ideas...and [I] have built my staff accordingly."[30] Organizationally, this required the close collaboration of those who were presenting ideas with those who had ideas to

29 "Official Program of the War Department Conference," Washington, D.C., 27-28 September, 1943: RG 226, Entry 85, box 10, File 208; Robert S. Patterson, Undersecretary of War, to General William J. Donovan (October 13, 1943).

30 Barton to Donovan (March 6, 1944): RG 226, Entry 99, Box 102, File 815.

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present; and the unrestricted license to shift among all known media—verbal, visual and audio; two-dimensional and three—to convey the facts of a constantly changing situation as quickly and clearly as possible. The best means of achieving this integration of form and content seemed to be to disengage the designers both from the filmmakers and the academicians, and confer upon them the full status of "Branch;" on a par with Research and Analysis, Secret Intelligence, or Special Operations. Thus, on May 9, 1944, on the eve of D-Day, American intelligence acquired its first dedicated division of designers.

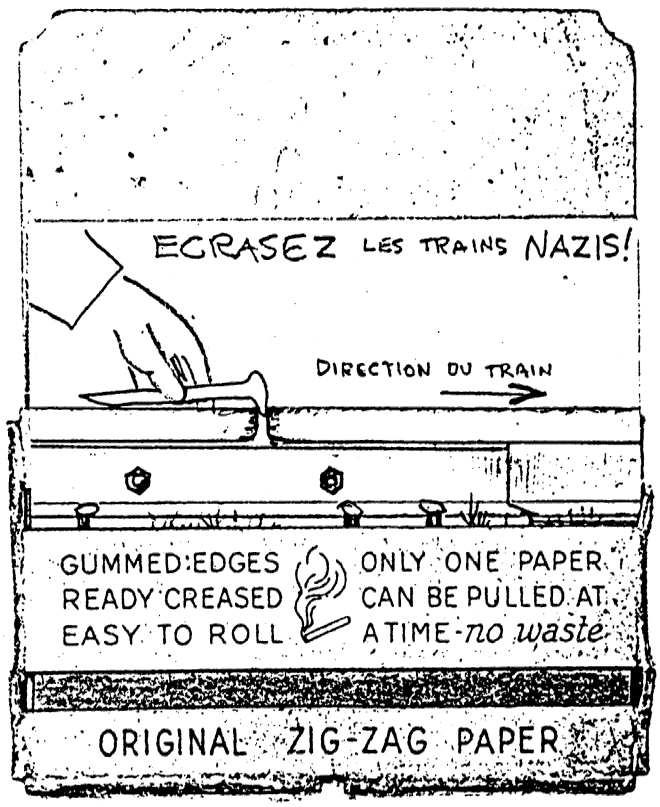

Figure 3
"Écrasez les trains Nazis!" Zig-Zag papers containing instructions on how to derail German supply trains. A minor contribution of the Graphics Section to the Normandy campaign.

In the final year of the war, the newly-designated Presentation Branch expanded its range of materials and media; extended its clientele to the Departments of State and Treasury; and exported its designers to overseas colonies in England, China and India. Increasingly, however, the concerns of the American intelligence community were shifting from war to peace, and the work of the Presentation Branch reflected this redirection. In January 1945, Secretary Stettinius wrote to his friend "Bill" Donovan that, "We are engaged in a number of very important projects which would be greatly facilitated by the use of presentation techniques," and requested that the services of the OSS designers be made available to the Department of State.[31] This overture led to a series of large-scale projects related to the design of the postwar world order.

31 [Secretary of State] "Ed" Stettinius to [Major General] "Bill" Donovan (January 10, 1945): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 25, File 413.

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Between August 21 and September 28, 1944; while the war still raged in Europe and the Pacific; delegates from thirty-nine governments met at the Dumbarton Oaks Center in Washington to lay the foundations of a postwar system of international security. On the basis of its proven record—their film version of the "War Department Report," narrated by Walter Huston, had by this time been seen by some ten million war workers across the country—the OSS Presentation Branch was asked to apply the techniques it had developed to a documentary film record of the proceedings.[32]

This assignment led directly to the first of two major postwar tasks undertaken by the designers of the OSS Presentation Branch. By the beginning of 1945, the Branch was at work on a series of projects relating to the forthcoming United Nations Conference in San Francisco—films, exhibits, publications, lecture materials, a full range of graphic services, and the behind-the scenes tasks of "stage management" at which it had become so adept. "It looks as though we are going to be in on one of the great historic occasions of our time," wrote Donal McLaughlin to his colleague, Carl Marzani, by then stationed overseas in London: "At least we are going to do everything we can to make it historic."[33] Two weeks later, in pursuit of destiny, McLaughlin and thirty-two of his Presentation Branch colleagues—including Lundquist, Saarinen, Benjamin Thompson, and Georg Olden—boarded a special train for the four-day trip to San Francisco, where they set up shop in rooms in the old War Memorial Building.

The San Francisco conference ran for two months, during which the services of the Presentation Branch were in constant demand. Architect Benjamin Thompson developed a system of flexible charts that enabled Secretary of State Stettinius, Foreign Ministers Anthony Eden and Vyacheslav Molotov, and South African President Jan Smuts to visualize the shape of the emerging organization and the shifting political forces it reflected. Oliver Lundquist, serving as "Presentation Officer," together with Broadway theatrical director Jo Mielziner, designed the stage setting for the final signing ceremony; working through the night, Graphics Chief McLaughlin created a lapel pin for the members of the national delegations, with an azimuthal equidistant world projection that so deftly met the political and aesthetic requirements of the occasion that it became (and remains) the official seal of the United Nations.

Such innocence as the designers still possessed was lost in San Francisco, as their graphical or stage designs met with storms of protest from delegates who perceived, better than they, that the placement of a chair, the choice of a color, or the positioning of a box on an organizational chart could have explosive ideological implications. Indeed, their attendance at virtually every committee meeting—innocuously hidden behind cameras or easels laden with diagrams and flow charts—finally put the designers of OSS in the

32 "Proposed State Department Film Report on the Dumbarton Oaks Conference" (n.d.): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 26, File 440.

33 Donal McLaughlin to Carl Marzani (April 3, 1945): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 45, File 746.

34 Lt. Gordon Dean, Office of Chief of Counsel (May 30, 1945): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 42, File 688; p. 6.

35 C. P. Kantianis to Lt. James Donovan: "Staging of Trials. The Courtroom of the International Tribunal" (June 12, 1945): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 42, File 687

36 Draft memorandum to Lt. Gordon Dean, (n.d.): RG 226 Entry 85, Box 40, File 681. Telephone interview with Dr. Henry Kellerman, February 26, 1996.

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Figure 4
Preliminary designs for the official U.N. lapel pin. Working within tight formal constraints and under an impossible deadline, Graphics Chief Donal McLaughlin created what is probably the most widely-recognized product of the OSS.

position of true intelligence officers, as their copious notes were transformed into political reports by the Research and Analysis Branch.

The lessons learned in managing the historic San Francisco conference were applied with comparable effect to the trials of the Nazi leaders implicated in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace. In May 1945, as four occupying armies fanned out across a shattered Germany, the Office of the Chief Counsel circulated a memorandum to OSS outlining a comprehensive program "to demonstrate Nazi guilt clearly to the world."[34] The role of the Presentation Branch in this process would include the collection of evidence; the preparation of graphic materials for use in the trial briefs and during the proceedings; and the architectural planning and layout of the courtroom itself. Having won the propaganda war, and with the legitimacy of the tribunal at stake, the designers were now challenged to solve a barrage of technical problems in ways that did not compromise "its dignity, its dominance, or its authenticity."[35] Since the guilt of the accused was a foregone conclusion, the task of the designers, though never so bluntly stated, was to contribute through every means at their disposal to this inevitable outcome.

Concretely, this meant that supplementing the arguments of the American prosecutors would be a body of visual materials planned and executed by the Branch: detailed wall charts elucidated the political empire of Hermann Goering; photomontages exposed the functioning of concentration camps; exhibits represented the chain of accountability in the occupied countries; films were produced for use during the trials and as part of a coordinated program of public information. Justice Jackson's opening arguments were supported by a six and one-half by fifteen-foot chart of the structure of the Nazi Party—"an intricate blueprint of the organization that wrecked Europe"—that was the product of six months of painstaking research by jurist Henry Kellerman of Research & Analysis and Cornelia Dodge, a twenty-four-year old graphic designer in the Presentation Branch. In Nuremberg, Kellerman reviewed the chart in the course of his interrogation of Robert Ley, who since 1933 had been the NSDAP Chief of Party organization. Ley, who once boasted that under Nazi rule "only sleep was still a private affair," verified the factual accuracy of their work but pointedly objected that its two-dimensional graphics had captured only the static structure and not the "soul" of the movement. Two day later, as if suddenly grasping the implications of his criticism he committed suicide in his cell.[36]

For over a year, OSS had been closely involved in the preparations for the war crimes trials. At one point, it was expected that General Donovan, himself—a skilled and flamboyant trial lawyer—would lead the prosecution. By the summer of 1945, the Presentation Branch had worked out the basic architectural logistics of the

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proceedings: the positioning of the judges, witnesses and defendants; apparatus for the presentation of evidence; facilities for a press corps expected to number in the hundreds; and the outfitting of offices, barracks and prison cells. There remained only the pressing problem of siting; which was resolved in July when an OSS surveying team, headed by the landscape architect Dan Kiley, began to close in on the medieval city of Nuremberg (Nürnberg). "I wanted the Nürnberg Opera House," Kiley recalled, "where we could have staged it in a very dramatic and thrilling way."[37] His dreams of a Wagnerian *Gotterdämmerung* were overruled, however, and the OSS designers team began work on the repair and retrofitting of Nuremberg's imposing Palace of Justice.

Having been influenced by the teachings of Walter Gropius at Harvard, Kiley set out to solve a simple problem of functional design, consistent with his brief that "there should be no allowance in design and layout for purely decorative, propagandistic, or journalistic purposes."[38] As the critique of the modernist project has, by now, long since demonstrated, there can be no design *degré zero*; and in the highly charged environment of Nuremberg political symbolism was as much a part of "function" as were electrical outlets and a reliable public address system. This is most evident in the ultimate



Figure 5
Opening arguments on day three of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. On the far wall is the Presentation Branch chart of the Nazi Party, "the organization that wrecked Europe."

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design of the courtroom, which placed the judges on high-backed, throne-like chairs; framed by their national flags, and towering over the twenty-one defendants seated directly across from them.[37] On the side wall was mounted a large screen on which the record of Nazi criminality could be projected. A model was presented to Justice Jackson, head of the American delegation. "He instantly approved the plan," recalled exhibition designer Robert Konikow, "appreciating the drama inherent in the face-to-face positioning of the defendants and the judges," with the battling attorneys arrayed in a no-man's land in between.[38] With the physical site established, a team of Presentation specialists headed by David Zablodowsky was despatched to Nuremberg, where they designed everything from wall charts to press passes. By the time the historic trials opened in November, however, the Office of Strategic Services—its spies, its intelligence analysts, and its designers—had itself become history.

6. History By Design

On September 20, 1945, with the chill of autumn and the Cold War already perceptible in the Washington air, President Truman thanked General Donovan and his staff for their work, and abolished the Office of Strategic Services. The reasons for this decision were complex, but its reputation for sheltering people "of progressive orientation," as ex-Communist Carl Marzani discreetly put it, did not endear the OSS to other government agencies in the months when the shooting war against German Fascism was solidifying into a Cold War against Russian Communism. Heroic efforts were made to keep various units of the agency intact but, with the end of the war, many individuals began to drift back to civilian law practices, unfinished academic manuscripts, or business careers. This pattern describes the Presentation Branch no less than Research and Analysis, or Special Operations.

By the time of the U.N. conference and the Nuremberg trials, the services of communications specialists—once tolerated as "an expendable luxury"—had come to seem indispensable in the policy process. The files of the Chief bulged with commendatory letters from high-ranking government officials, and Barton was asked to prepare a detailed proposal for the setting up of such an operation within the State Department. He seized this opportunity, once again, to elaborate the theory of presentation that had evolved during the war. It was not simply a matter of providing graphic services to random clients, he argued. Once the appropriate agencies had generated their basic facts and statistics, "Presentation performs the next stage in the process; that of selecting and producing the most effective means for transmitting the information to those responsible for ultimate review and decision."[40]

37 Gordon Dean to General William Donovan, "Trial Site" (July 9, 1945): RG 226, Entry 85, Box. 39, File 687. Kiley's rather inflated recollections of Nuremberg appear in the local Vermont publication *North by Northeast* 3, No. 3 (July 1988), pp 6–9, 24, and are repeated by Calvin Thompkins in his appreciation, "The Garden Artists," *The New Yorker* (October 16, 1995). For another perspective on Kiley's contributions to American Modernism, cf. Gregg Bleam, "Modern and Classical Themes in the Work of Dan Kiley," in Marc Treib, ed., *Modern Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, 1993) 220–249.

38 "Problems Related to the Selection or Construction of the War Crimes Courtroom," Presentation Branch internal memorandum (n.d.): RG 226, Entry 85, Box 42, File 687.

39 From a private memoir graciously provided to the author by Mr. Robert Konikow: ch. 7, pp. 6–7.

40 "Proposed State Department Presentation Division" (February 1, 1945): RG 226 Entry 85, Box 25, File 413, 2.

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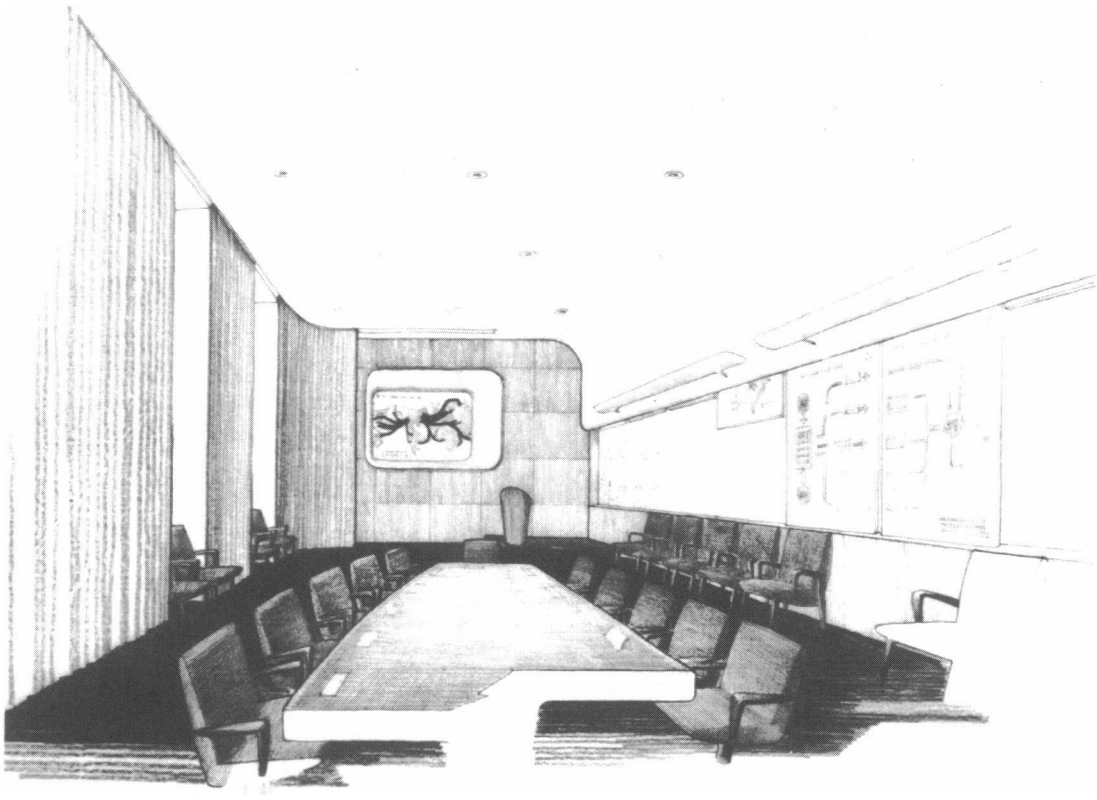

Figure 6
Proposed State Department Presentation Room a drawing by Eero Saarinen. "The general design of the room is intended to accommodate these [technical] facilities without loss of the traditional dignity of diplomatic surroundings."

Matters were not, however, to progress so straightforwardly. The end of the war saw the rapid demobilization of much of the intelligence community, and when the State Department authorized a staff of thirty-five as compared with the ninety Barton had proposed, he foresaw the dispersion of the extraordinary team he had so patiently assembled as Chief. Accordingly, the idea emerged that the Branch might, in effect, be "privatized" during this period of uncertainty; and the six, ranked members put up $500 each; rented office space in a brownstone on "I" Street; and created the firm of "Presentation Associates." McLaughlin resigned from his government position to become its full-time Production Director.

In the first few months of its existence, the firm received an almost continuous flow of work, mostly from government agencies for whom its members had worked during the war. But in the spring of 1946, an extraordinary chain of events began to unfold. With the demobilization of the industrial workforce, the immediate postwar period witnessed a profound renegotiation of labor-management relations in the United States, manifest by a wave of militancy in the steel, automotive, communications, and electrical industries. A massive strike by the radical United Electrical Workers of America, violently suppressed by the Philadelphia police, had reignited the political passions of Carl Marzani, and he accepted with alacrity an offer from comrades in the UE/CIO to produce a

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film—*Deadline for Action*, it would be called—documenting the renewal of the class struggle.

Marzani's no-holds-barred film bore all the marks of his years with the OSS: animated graphics that had once traced the rise of the German Luftwaffe now exposed the rule of the American finance aristocracy; the montage techniques—using headlines, still photos, excerpts from speeches, and interviews—that had once summoned industrial workers to the anti-Fascist war, now rallied them against the capitalist ruling class. Although he had thinly attempted to distance his project from Presentation Associates (by this time, at work on a documentary for the Federal Reserve!), the connection was readily made when Marzani was indicted for having lied on his Civil Service forms about his prior membership in the Communist Party. General Donovan—now back in his civilian law practice—declined to take the case; Marzani was sent to prison; Barton was fired on the spurious grounds of "maladministration;" and Presentation Associates was dealt a reeling but not fatal blow. The Cold War had begun, and it was a time of scoundrels.[41]

During these eventful years, however, "presentation design" had gone from a dubious and untested concept to become a vital link in a chain of intelligence, analysis and policy. Moreover, it had enabled designers to make one more critical step in their evolution toward professional identity and autonomy. Like the new sciences of atomic physics and cryptanalysis, design evolved under the exigencies of war; owing nothing to conventional academic categories and everything to the job that needed to be done. In this case, that job was to put intelligence data into forms that could be quickly assimilated and, just as quickly, translated into action.

The allied professions of design served during World War II as they have since: as a bridge—"a bridge between technicians and policy makers; a bridge between policy makers and those responsible for its execution; a bridge between those making and executing policy, and the public on whose understanding and agreement the success of policy depends."[42] The designers did not win the war, but neither, by themselves, did the generals, the diplomats, or the physicists. It was, in the truest sense, a united front in which the young design professions played an honorable and enduring role.

41 Materials for the preceding section come from an interview with Carl Marzani (New York: August 4, 1994), from his memoir, "From Pentagon to Penitentiary," from Hubert Barton's "Response to State Department Accusations in February of 1947" (in the collection of Marie Barton), and from interviews with Donal McLaughlin.

42 "Proposed State Department Presentation Division" (February 1, 1945): RG 226 Entry 85, Box 25, File 413, 2.

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