

## Front to Rear: Architecture and Planning during World War II

Conference co-organized by the Institute of Fine Arts, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal, and Princeton University's School of Architecture

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Institute of Fine Arts, New York University  
1 East 78th Street, NYC

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#### *Architecture as an "Administrative Function": From the New Deal to War Mobilization*

When the United States entered World War II, a decade spent tracking the philosophies, policies, and investment activities of the federal government had prepared the architectural profession for war mobilization. The dramatic expansion of the state apparatus during the New Deal and governmental interventions in city planning, housing, and public works had positioned the government as both a potential client for architectural services and (as in the case of FHA mortgage insurance, for example) a source of systemic changes affecting architecture through the building industry. During the 1930s, the architectural profession "modernized" in large part by adapting to its potential new role in relation to the state. The New Deal introduced an evolving conception of the state's role in the national economy, envisioned in terms of a flexible and open-ended set of managerial processes or "administrative functions," that arguably served as a model for retooling the architectural profession during this period. Mobilization for the war brought new opportunities and new rhetoric to architecture but did not alter this trajectory of its professional evolution.

Through a contextual reading of the discourse in American architectural periodicals of the war years I propose to examine a transformation in the identity of the architect and the meanings and processes of architectural design. Encouraged to "go to Washington" to offer their services in the war effort, architects were advised to think of themselves as "coordinators" and "strategists." The role of architectural expertise in wartime construction was envisioned as a function of managing productive systems of organized complexity, operated by teams of various experts. Years of following government bureaucracy made architects proficient in the New Deal logic of the regulatory and managerial state, and they saw this logic extended to the organization of wartime production and construction. As architects in a sense modeled themselves after government administrators, architectural design was reframed as a process of organization or a regulatory function. The practical effects of this shift in approach are evidenced in many large-scale architectural commissions for the war effort, such as temporary housing for the war industry and military bases.

**Anna Vallye** is a Ph.D. Candidate in art history at Columbia University. She is currently completing a dissertation on the American careers of Walter Gropius and Gyorgy Kepes. She has an essay on science as an inspiration in the work of the German-American artist Ruth Vollmer in *Thinking the Line: Ruth Vollmer, 1961-1978* (2006). Her article on the 1950s interdisciplinary journal "trans/formation: arts, communication, environment" is forthcoming this spring in *Grey Room*.