

**CALL FOR ESSAYS: Fuzzy Math**

**Deadline:** Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

Essays must be received by **5:00pm EST**

*What are the metrics or dimensions that govern your behavior in a city?*

*What are the “costs” and what are the “benefits” of living or working in a city?*

*How do you quantify your actions – literally or figuratively – in ecological, economic, or political terms?*

For our second annual competition for evocative, non-fiction writing, **Urban Omnibus** is soliciting essays that reflect on the topic of cost, metrics, and measurement in urban life.

Environmental imperatives – and the urgency of shocking people out of climate change complacency – have accelerated the quantification of consumption habits and settlement patterns. This quantitative turn, supported by the availability of big data, has distracted us from unpacking the qualitative, cultural attitudes that underlie political inaction.

Meanwhile, the cost of some of what we consume in cities – like real estate – is reflected in its price structure, yet a lot of it – like parking, parks, or pollution – is not. Even if the environmental benefits of urban density are starting to be understood, an accepted calculus of a city’s externalities remains far from precise, subsumed in a metaphorical language of carbon footprints or numerical valuations like LEED. So let’s put it in personal terms. How do you measure your behavior: In rent? In square feet? The number of laps run around the park? MetroCard swipes? Brand of light bulb? The distance food travels to end up on your plate? What are urban public goods – drinking water, open space, public access television, fireworks displays – worth to you?

Essays might propose an alternative data set of quality of life indicators, relate a personal story of home economics, find the comedy in cap and trade, argue for or against the right to free parking, imagine the interior monologue of New York’s 1,000,000<sup>th</sup> tree.

With this competition, **Urban Omnibus** invites writers to infuse the quantitative language that pervades environmental understanding with narrative, theory, history, or humor. In so doing, we seek to advance our dedication to redefining the culture of citymaking by questioning how we talk about environmental challenges.

**AWARD**

The jury will select one first-prize essay, whose author will receive an award of \$500. Up to two second place winners will receive prizes of \$250 each.

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## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

Staff and board members of the Architectural League are not eligible for this competition. All others are encouraged to submit. The criteria for selection include the quality of the prose, the originality of the interpretive position on cities, and the extent to which an essay provokes readers to discover something new or surprising in a familiar urban condition.

## **SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS**

Essays should be between 800 and 2000 words. Suggestions of imagery to support or illustrate the essay are strongly encouraged.

Submissions must be emailed as letter-sized PDFs. The applicant's name and essay title must appear at the top of the first page of the PDF. Email submissions to [info@urbanomnibus.net](mailto:info@urbanomnibus.net) with "FUZZY MATH: ESSAY SUBMISSION" as the subject line.

Submissions must be received **by 5:00pm EST on Friday, March 22nd, 2013**. Late submissions will not be accepted. Questions about this call for essays can be sent to [info@urbanomnibus.net](mailto:info@urbanomnibus.net). Winners will be announced in April.

## **JURY**

**Michelle Addington** is the Hines Professor of Sustainable Architectural Design at the Yale School of Architecture and a professor at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. She researches discrete systems and technology transfer, and she serves as an adviser on energy and sustainability for many organizations, including the Department of Energy and the American Institute of Architects. In addition to architecture, her background includes the design of components for unmanned spacecraft at NASA / Goddard Space Flight Center and work as a power plant engineer and manufacturing supervisor at DuPont. Prior to teaching at Yale, Professor Addington taught at Harvard University, Temple University and Philadelphia University.

**Andrew Blum** is a contributing editor at *Urban Omnibus*. He is the author of *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet*, the first book-length look at the physical heart of the Internet itself. When not immersed in the Internet's depths, Blum writes about architecture, design, technology, urbanism, art, and travel.

**Rosalie Genevro**, Executive Director, The Architectural League of New York

**Philip Kay** is finishing a book called *'Guttersnipes' & 'Eliterates': City College in the Popular Imagination*, the story of how the New York public has used the fabled "Harvard of the Poor" to reconfigure itself over seventy years of tabloid scandals involving communist professors, crooked basketball players, ill-prepared students, and other polarizing figures. He is also the translator of the Barcelona-based, biannual magazine, *D'Ur: Architecture, Urbanism & Cities Now*. Kay's essay "[Transgressing the Grid: Adventures On \(and off\) Manhattan Island](#)" was the winner of the first annual Urban Omnibus writing competition.

**Cassim Shepard**, Editor, *Urban Omnibus*, The Architectural League of New York

**Varick Shute**, Digital Editorial Director, The Architectural League of New York

**Shin-pei Tsay** is the director of Cities and Transportation in the Energy and Climate Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Her research focuses on urban and regional planning issues, particularly in relation to transportation, economic development, energy, and climate change policy.

**Andrew Wade**, Mills Fellow, The Architectural League of New York