

Off the Shelf

Recent books with Harvard connections

Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War, by Marvin Kalb, Murrow professor of practice emeritus (Brookings Institution, \$29). Amid other geopolitical concerns, it is easy to overlook Ukraine. Kalb explains the history leading to the current conflict; keeping the current confrontation “cold” might be a fortunate outcome, in a fraught part of the world.

Two more takes on the world and management of its perceived trouble spots: **The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire**, by Susan Pedersen '81, Ph.D. '89, RI '95 and '03 (Oxford, \$34.95). A sweeping global history of the League of Nations and the “mandates” (World War I territorial conquests) that it oversaw, as the modern world took shape—up to the resumption of global war.



The author is professor of history at Columbia. **Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman**, by Greg Grandin (Metropolitan Books, \$28). A critical interpretation, by a New York University historian, argues that Henry A. Kissinger '50, Ph.D. '54, as national security adviser to President Richard Nixon, created a militarized, imperial presidency. The book opens with a stark confrontation with former Harvard colleagues over the U.S. invasion of Cambodia.

The Graduate School Mess, by Leonard Cassuto, Ph.D. '89 (Harvard, \$29.95). A Fordham professor of English—one of those humanities fields afflicted with long times to the Ph.D., vanishing academic job prospects, antiquated requirements, etc.—draws attention to universities' relative inattention to an ethic of teaching and preparation of students for life, likely largely *outside* the research university.

Leadership: Essential Writings by Our Greatest Thinkers, edited by Elizabeth D. Samet '91 (W.W. Norton, \$35). The newest Norton anthologist, a professor of English at West Point (and faculty adviser to Army Baseball), draws incredibly widely (from Virgil and Lao Tzu to Eugene Debs and Zadie Smith) to illuminate the essential tasks of leadership: from studying a system to cultivating trust—and beyond.

Frederick Law Olmsted: Plans and Views of Public Parks, edited by

Charles E. Beveridge '56, Lauren Meier, M.L.A. '83, and Irene Mills (Johns Hopkins, \$74.95). Beveridge, the preeminent Olmsted scholar (and editor of his collected *Papers*, working here

Top: View from Longwood Bridge (1920) along the Olmsted-redesigned Muddy River, Boston and Brookline.
Bottom: 1867 plan for “Fort Green or Washington Park, in the city of Brooklyn,” New York

with colleagues on the project) gathers in a sumptuous, gorgeous volume the designs that defined what made many American cities great, and livable.

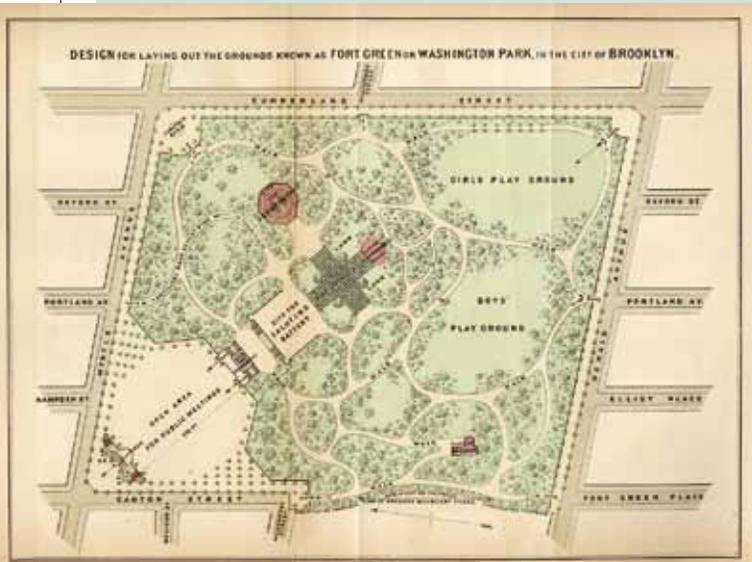
Climate Shock: The Economic Consequences of a Hotter Planet, by Gernot Wagner '02, Ph.D. '07, and Martin L. Weitzman, professor of economics (Princeton, \$27.95). The Environmental Defense Fund's lead senior economist and a Harvard professor explain, in lay terms, why uncertainty about the degree of global warming, and the possibility of catastrophic change, ought to induce action, much as one would insure against any other kind of risk. In **Harness the Sun** (Beacon Press, \$32), Philip Warburg '77, J.D. '85, past president of the Conservation Law Foundation, makes the case for solar power as a mainstream solution.

All the Wild That Remains, by David Gessner '83 (W.W. Norton, \$26.95). A nature writer immerses himself in the lives and visions of Edward Abbey and Wallace Stegner, two writers who conjured the modern West, in radically different ways.

Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision, by Lewis Lockwood, Peabody professor of music emeritus (W.W. Norton, \$29.95). The leading Beethoven scholar introduces each symphony in turn, presenting them as “individual works of art” placed in the context of their “historical, biographical, and creative origins.”

The Rise of the Right to Know, by Michael Schudson, Ph.D. '76 (Harvard, \$29.95). An examination of “Politics and the Culture of Transparency, 1945-1975” (the subtitle), by a Columbia journalism professor, emphasizes the relative infancy of the right to know, from the Freedom of Information Act to fuller disclosure on product labels and environmental-impact statements.

Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature, by Alva Noë, Ph.D. '95 (Hill and Wang, \$28). Lest the intersection of art and philosophy seem daunting, the author, professor of philosophy at Berkeley (where he also works on cognitive science), writes with brilliant clarity about the intersec-



tion of the scientific (why can humans see much from such limited neural data?) and artistic (why do humans see so little) perspectives. Stimulating throughout.

Car Safety Wars: One Hundred Years of Technology, Politics, and Death, by Michael R. Lemov, LL.B. '59 (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, \$85). In a year of record recalls of exploding air bags, a consumer-product-safety lawyer reviews the history of automotive design and regulation.

My Beautiful City Austin, by David Heymann, M.Arch. '88 (John Hardy Publishing, \$24). The author, an architect and University of Texas professor of that craft, here writes seven stories about a young practitioner who cannot dissuade clients from rotten decisions—hence, as the first tale puts it, “the scar tissue of a city.”

After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene, by Jedediah Purdy '97 (Harvard, \$29.95). On a planet increasingly shaped by human action (climate change, industrial emissions laid down in geographical strata), Duke's Everett professor of law explores how to proceed in an era where people and nature, far from being separate, are increasingly one and the same.

Birth, Death, and a Tractor, by Kelly Payson-Roopchand '92 (Down East Books, \$24.95). From Somerville, Maine, “Connecting an Old Farm to a New Family,” as the subtitle puts it, from the early 1800s to the arrival of newcomers in 2008. **The Point of Vanishing: A Memoir of Two Years in Solitude**, by Howard Axelrod '95 (Beacon Press, \$16 paperback), is a differently situated (Vermont) northern New England memoir, by an occasional contributor to these pages, who focuses on cultivation of the self, rather than the land.

Married Sex: A Love Story, by Jesse Kornbluth '68 (Open Road, \$12.99 paper). A Manhattan divorce lawyer, his wife (a Barnard dean), and lover. A first novel by the cultural counselor who created Head Butler (see “Passionate Concierge,” September-October 2006, page 21).

Yet *Only the Animals* is apolitical. It engenders empathy, shame, and sadness, but also wonder at these spirited creatures. They face what life and death bring with enviable presence of mind and body, as visceral beings. “What choice did she have,” asks the parrot in Beirut, “but to hook my cage to the awning overhead and leave as quietly as she could, before I realized I was alone?”

“I am very aware that we are all creatures who suffer together, and that existence is hard for us all,” Dovey reflects. “There is something, also, about the bond we have

with animals, the care and connection that we don't appreciate or see the magic in as much as we should.” Animal guides, she points out, have graced children's literature throughout the world. “They are like oracles, there at our very earliest attempts to build empathy and imagination.” And that takes work, she says: those capacities “do not come automatically, in the sense that cruelty is a failure of the imagination. Something happens in reading through these animal guides that is very tied up in what it means to be a good human being.”

Mathematics from the Inside Out

A practitioner on the human enterprise of pure mathematics

by AVNER ASH

IN 1940, in the shadow of World War II, G.H. Hardy, one of the great mathematicians of the twentieth century, published a short book called *A Mathematician's Apology*. Hardy argued that the great bulk of higher mathematics—and in particular his branch of it, number theory—while useless, derives its worth from its enduring truth and beauty.

Hardy was dogmatic in his thinking and style. For example, here is what he said about his own endeavor in writing his book:

If then I find myself writing, not mathematics but “about” mathematics, it is a confession of weakness, for which I may rightly be scorned or pitied by younger and more vigorous mathematicians. I write about mathematics because, like any other mathematician who has passed sixty, I have no longer the freshness of mind, the energy, or the patience to carry on effectively with my proper job.

The world is now much changed. Advanced number theory is crucially applied to cryptology, enabling, among other things, fairly secure transmission of credit card, financial, and other data over the Internet—and presumably the spying activities of the National Security Agency. The

attachment to Truth and Beauty felt by Hardy has been shaken to its foundations by postmodern thought.

It is high time for Michael Harris's book, *mathematics without apologies*. Note, for starters, the lack of capital letters in the title. Harris, also a great mathematician past the age of 60 (he is a professor at Columbia and the Université Paris Diderot), has written a very interesting, very peculiar, and very timely essay on the “what” and “why” of pure mathematics.

Unless you are also a mathematician, you are not likely to have much understanding of the inner professional life of a mathematician, even if you have studied the subject for many years in school. Why is that? And should you care? If you do care, then this book may help explain why the essence of mathematics is so foreign to most people, how the practice of mathematics feels to the working research mathematician, and what attracts mathematicians to their work.

By mixing memory and desire with mathematics, Harris has provided fresh responses to all the standard questions: “What do mathematicians do, actually?”

mathematics without apologies: portrait of a problematic vocation, by Michael Harris, Ph.D. '77 (Princeton, \$29.95)