This book compares resistance to technology across time, nations and technologies. Three post-war technologies – nuclear power, information technology and biotechnology – are used in the analysis. The focus is on post-1945 Europe, with comparisons made with the USA, Japan and Australia. Instead of assuming that resistance contributes to the failure of a technology, the main thesis of this book is that resistance is a constructive force in technological development, giving technology its particular shape in a particular context. Whilst many people still believe in science and technology, many have become more sceptical of the allied ‘progress’. By exploring the idea that modernity creates effects that undermine its own foundations, forms and effects of resistance are explored in various contexts.

The book presents a unique interdisciplinary study, including contributions from historians, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists.
Resistance to new technology
Resistance to new technology

nuclear power
information technology
and
biotechnology

edited by
MARTIN BAUER
Contents

Contributors  

Preface  

-1-  
Resistance to new technology and its effects on nuclear power, information technology and biotechnology  
MARTIN BAUER  

PART I  Conceptual issues  

-2-  
The crisis of ‘Progress’  
ALAIN TOURAINE  

-3-  
Reinterpreting ‘Luddism’: resistance to new technology in the British Industrial Revolution  
ADRIAN RANDALL  

-4-  
The changeability of public opinions about new technology: assimilation effects in attitude surveys  
DANCKER D L DAAMEN and IVO A VAN DER LAN  

-5-  
‘Technophobia’: a misleading conception of resistance to new technology  
MARTIN BAUER  

PART II  Case studies  

-6-  
Patterns of resistance to new technologies in Scandinavia: an historical perspective  
KRISTINE BRULAND
-7- Henry Ford’s relationship to ‘Fordism’: ambiguity as a modality of technological resistance
JOHN STAUDENMAIER

-8- Resistance to nuclear technology: optimists, opportunists and opposition in Australian nuclear history
ROY MACLEOD

-9- New technology in Fleet Street, 1975–80
RODERICK MARTIN

-10- The impact of resistance to biotechnology in Switzerland: a sociological view of the recent referendum
MARLIS BUCHMANN

PART III International comparisons

-11- The politics of resistance to new technology: semiconductor diffusion in France and Japan until 1965
ANTONIO J J BOTELHO

-12- User resistance to new interactive media: participants, processes and paradigms
IAN MILES and GRAHAM THOMAS

-13- The impact of anti-nuclear power movements in international comparison
DIETER RUCHT

-14- In the engine of industry: regulators of biotechnology, 1970–86
ROBERT BUD
PART IV Comparisons of different technologies

-16-
Learning from Chernobyl for the fight against genetics?
Stages and stimuli of German protest movements – a comparative synopsis
JOACHIM RADKAU

-17-
Individual and institutional impacts upon press coverage of sciences: the case of nuclear power and genetic engineering in Germany
HANS MATHIAS KEPPLINGER

-18-
Forms of intrusion: comparing resistance to information technology and biotechnology in the USA
DOROTHY NELKIN

PART V Afterword

-19-
Towards a functional analysis of resistance
MARTIN BAUER

Index
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Preface


The aims of the meeting were (a) to take stock of the forms and effects of resistance in the recent past; (b) to compare different technologies in this context; and (c) to think about, and work towards, a functional analysis of resistance in the process of technological development. The meeting provided material to overcome the technocratic bias according to which resistance is nothing but a nuisance in the technological process.

When comparing the forms and effects of resistance the book focuses on three major developments since 1945: nuclear power, computing and information technology, and biotechnology. The story told is mainly, but not exclusively, European. In making comparisons the contributions reach out historically to the origins of the idea of ‘progress’ and the Luddite revolt of the early nineteenth century, and geographically to Australia, North America and Japan. The scope of the book prohibits the inclusion of several dimensions of the problem of resistance worth mentioning. First, the book excludes the problems of resistance or non-resistance to new technology in authoritarian and totalitarian systems such as Eastern Europe between 1945 and the collapse of communism, the USSR, or China. Secondly, it excludes the problem of resistance to new technology in developing regions such as South America, India and South East Asia: these topics provide the scope for another conference.

I would like to thank all contributors and reviewers for their cooperation in reworking the papers making the publication of the book in its present form possible. I would like to thank Kathy Angeli, who handled much of the organization of the conference; Jane Gregory and Victoria Smith, for help during various stages of the editorial process; and Fiona Thomson, at Cambridge University Press, for her patience and genuine interest. Finally, my special thanks go to John Durant, whose projects I have shared for the last three years and whose friendly encouragement made this book possible.

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