

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

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**nuclear power  
information  
technology  
and  
biotechnology**

**edited by  
MARTIN BAUER**

The National Museum  of Science & Industry  
**Science Museum**

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## Preface

This book combines contributions from a conference on 'Resistance to New Technology – Past and Present', held at the Science Museum, London, on 5–7 April 1993. The event brought together historians, sociologists, political scientists, media researchers and psychologists to reflect on the problem of 'resistance' in relation to technological developments. Around 150 people from twenty countries gathered in the unusual setting of steam engines, automobiles and space rockets provided by the Science Museum.

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.

Martin Bauer, London, February 1994