Vulnerability in Technological Cultures: New Directions in Research and Governance (Inside Technology)

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Novel technologies and scientific advancements offer not only opportunities but risks. Technological systems are vulnerable to human error and technical malfunctioning that have far-reaching consequences: one flipped switch can cause a cascading power failure across a networked electric grid. Yet, once addressed, vulnerability accompanied by coping mechanisms may yield a more flexible and resilient society. This book investigates vulnerability, in both its negative and positive aspects, in technological cultures. The contributors argue that viewing risk in terms of vulnerability offers a novel approach to understanding the risks and benefits of science and technology. Such an approach broadens conventional risk analysis by connecting to issues of justice, solidarity, and livelihood, and enabling comparisons between the global north and south. The book explores case studies that range from agricultural practices in India to neonatal intensive care medicine in Western hospitals; these cases, spanning the issues addressed in the book, illustrate what vulnerability is and does. The book offers conceptual frameworks for empirical description and analysis of vulnerability that elucidate its ambiguity, context dependence, and constructed nature. Finally, the book addresses the implications of these analyses for the governance of vulnerability, proposing a more reflexive way of dealing with vulnerability in technological cultures.

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Pamela Bost:

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