



# Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change (Inside Technology)

*Wiebe E. Bijker*

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This book crystallizes and extends the important work Wiebe Bijker has done in the last decade to found a full-scale theory of sociotechnical change that describes where technologies come from and how societies deal with them. *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs* integrates detailed case studies with theoretical generalizations and political analyses to offer a fully rounded treatment both of the relations between technology and society and of the issues involved in sociotechnical change.

The stories of the the safety bicycle, the first truly synthetic plastic, and the fluorescent light bulb -- each a fascinating case study in itself -- reflect a cross section of time periods, engineering and scientific disciplines, and economic, social, and political cultures. The bicycle story explores such issues as the role of changing gender relationships in shaping a technology; the Bakelite story examines the ways in which social factors intrude even in cases of seemingly pure chemistry and entrepreneurship; and the fluorescent bulb story offers insights into the ways in which political and economic relationships can affect the form of a technology.

Bijker's method is to use these case studies to suggest theoretical concepts that serve as building blocks in a more and more inclusive theory, which is then tested against further case studies. His main concern is to create a basis for science, technology, and social change that uncovers the social roots of technology, making it amenable to democratic politics.

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