



Viewing the Earth: The Social Construction of the Landsat Satellite System (Inside Technology)

Pamela Etter Mack

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Viewing the Earth examines the role played by interest groups in shaping the process of technological change, offering valuable insights into how technologies evolve. It traces the history of Landsat from its origins through the launch and use of the first few satellites, showing how a variety of forces shape the form and the eventual reception of any new technology.

The Landsat earth resources satellite system was a project of The National Aeronautics and Space Administration that was created to collect data about earth resources from space. The first satellite was launched in 1972 with great fanfare and high expectations. The data proved useful for everything from finding oil to predicting harvests, yet today the successful commercialization of the program is still uncertain. Why?

To answer this question, Pamela E. Mack focuses on the negotiating process that went on among different parts of the space agency, other interested government agencies, and various organizations that were potential users of the data. This formal and informal negotiating process, she points out, involved not only choices between alternative technologies and the satellite but also conflicting definitions of what the satellite would do. The story is full of fascinating detail, from the concerns of the intelligence community over civilian satellites looking at the earth to the politics of agricultural survey.

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