Contents

Series editor's foreword ix
Preface and acknowledgements xiii

Introduction 1
  Public discourse and the social sciences 2
  The societal significance of risk 3
  Theoretical approach 5
  Structure of the book 6

Part one  Problems, debates, frameworks and theories 9

1 The risk discourse: the contemporary concern with risk 11
  First phase: nuclear energy, safety research and the risk assessment debate 13
  Second phase: nuclear and environmental opposition and the social acceptability of risk 16
  Third phase: public concern and the problem of risk perception 21
  Fourth phase: full-scale public risk discourse 25
  Summary 34

2 Background theories and frameworks of understanding 36
  Background theories: from human ecology to the theory of modernity 37
  Epistemological frameworks: realism and constructivism 46
  Summary 52

3 Major theoretical directions 53
  Critical theory of the risk society 54
  Sceptical theory of the contingent society 63
  Summary 69
Part two  Cultural and institutional analysis

4 Risk – what is it?
   Risk semantics
   Lexical and conceptual history of risk
   Scheme of safety and danger
   Classification of the semantic field of risk
   The universal, global and irreversible quality of new risks
   The reality of risk and its social construction
   Summary

5 Societal production of risk: society as laboratory
   From religion to science
   Culturally defined processes of risk production: the state and science
   The modern relation to nature: organic, mechanical and cybernetic
   The experimenting society: society as laboratory
   Summary

6 Discursive construction of risk: the new public sphere
   The communication revolution and the transformation of the public sphere
   Public communication, discourse, and the contemporary public sphere
   The social construction of risk
   Summary

7 Consensus and conflict in the risk society
   Changing cultural foundations: nature
   Emergent cultural forms of legitimation: sustainability, responsibility, citizenship
   Emergent institutions: new and reflexive
   The nascent society of the twenty-first century: world government and bio-society?
   Summary

Part three  Rethinking the risk society

8 Towards a new critical theory
   Risk society, knowledge society, communication society
   The new cognitive sociology
   Constructivism
   Responsibility in the experimenting society
   Socio-cognitive critique
   The public role of sociology

9 Conclusion

References
Index