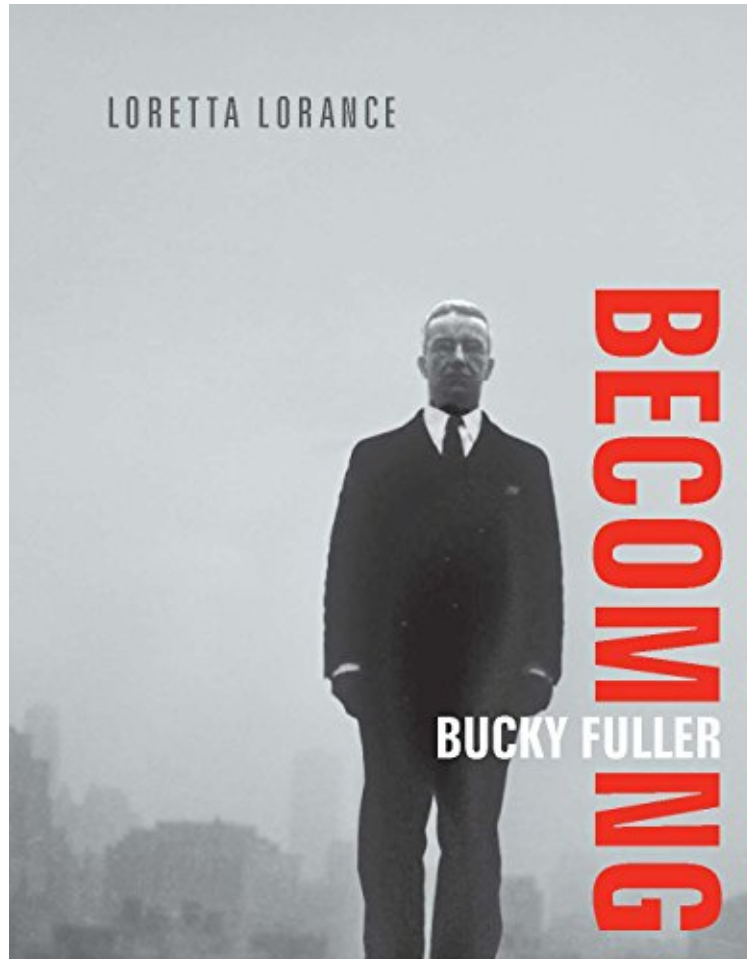


[Download] Becoming Bucky Fuller (MIT Press)

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Loretta Lorange

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Loretta Lorange : Becoming Bucky Fuller (MIT Press) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Becoming Bucky Fuller (MIT Press):

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A long overdue assesmentBy Jerry RichardsonFirst of all, this is not the character assassination of Fuller that some had feared. Over the years since his death some critics have hinted that RBF'S Chronofile and biography did not match up well as regards his early projects and career. This assessment is easy and very long overdue. The real fun starts with an assesment of his life from Nine Chains to the Moon on and an analysis of the source material of his ideas. This will be much more controversial and political than many think. This book partially clears the air on the early career of RBF and is well illustrated and researched.11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Disappointing read, questionable scholarshipBy C. M. CookI have been reading Lorange's book concurrently with "Fuller Houses" (Neder), "Your Private Sky" (Krausse and Lichtenstein) and "New Views on R. Buckminster Fuller" (Chu and Trujillo). Relative to these three excellent collections of essays I am disappointed by the lack of analysis and insight in Lorange's biography. Certainly there is no outright "character assassination" of

Fuller, but Lorraine's central thesis, that Fuller somewhat deceptively manufactured his identity as a visionary out of his failure as a businessman is not made salient or even especially interesting relative to other aspects of his remarkable life and character. Lorraine barely discusses the tectonic transformation of the original Fuller/Lightful/4D/Dymaxion house from the patent application to the 1930 version. She includes much detail about RBF's employment history, and the early conceptualization of a corporation to build manufactured homes, but little about the design process which clearly made critical leaps over this period, both in the physical manifestation and the philosophical underpinnings. Lorraine is insistent that Fuller willfully changed the house from a viable enterprise to a commercially impossible vision of the future but she fails to explain how the design evolved and was adapted to Fuller's increasingly Utopian proposition. Lorraine prefers looking for moments where Fuller seems to obfuscate, retract, or rearrange his history, while ignoring the concurrent process and development of his seminal project. I buy portions of Lorraine's argument, in particular that Fuller began Dymaxion with an earnest notion of a bone fide enterprise not as a pie-in-the-sky Utopian construct. But the reasons for that are straight forward: it was the industry he knew best, both in terms of techniques and contacts; he was concerned for his young family and their finances and wished to be held in some esteem by his extended family, particularly his father-in-law with whom things were sticky after Fuller's problems at Stockade, and, finally, in the gestalt of the time enterprise and the entrepreneurial spirit were exalted. If anything Lorraine's book paints a picture of a man emerging from a protracted adolescence, one which required some earnest post-rationalizations to cover immature behavior. This in no way detracts from Fuller's achievements, and makes him all the more human. By being less of a sleuth and more empathetic Lorraine might have written a more insightful book. But my major beef with this book is what seems to be cherry picking scholarship in Lorraine's research. In one case -hopefully there are not more- she seems to avoid, indeed questions the existence of a document that contradicts her argument. Specifically, Lorraine states (pg 155): "he [Fuller] planned to lecture at the Architecture League in July 1929 and solicit commentary from the audience for possible incorporation in the text" of a book about the Dymaxion House to be published by Scribners later that year. She then says "if the afternoon proceeded as planned, Fuller elected not to incorporate the suggestions." In her end notes Lorraine claims her information about the event comes from another document, the "Draft of Invitation to Co-operative Lecture" Chronofile vol. 39 (1931) then states: "It is unknown if this invitation was sent or if the lecture was given as planned. There is nothing further in Fuller's papers, and the author was not permitted to research in the archives of the Architecture League of Manhattan." (note 63 pg 264) Yet the transcript of this same lecture is reprinted in *Your Private Sky*, and a mimeographed copy of the text, recorded by a stenographer, is in Fuller's Chronofile (Chronofile Vol. 36 (BFA) 1929). In this example Lorraine does exactly what she accuses Fuller of doing: obfuscating, ignoring or slightly altering evidence to justify her interpretation of events. It is one thing for the subject of the biography to do this, but the biographer herself? She goes on to claim Scribner's dropped a possible Dymaxion book in 1929 because Fuller was an inept writer and refused to use a ghost writer. Yet she does not give any solid evidence of this and worse, does not mention the fact of the stockmarket crash of October 1929 which was concurrent with the book contract discussion. (In fact some (certainly not all) of 4D Timelock is quite readable (extracts are in *Your Private Sky*) and is convincing of Fuller's argument for manufactured housing). This is one example where context was left out in a way that could easily alter one's interpretation of an event. As I continue to fill in my knowledge of Fuller's career I fear stumbling upon other inconsistencies and manipulation of the record in Lorraine's biography. There is some good scholarship here, but I am reading it now with a jaundiced eye.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

geat new information on BuckyBy AnthThis book is a must for anyone seriously interested in the pre-geodesic dome years of Fuller. It's chatty tone is easy to read with the one exception being Chapter 5. This is easy to forgive, though, because that chapter is the only breakdown of "4D Timelock" and some of his other early writings which are tough to read themselves. It's surprising that Fuller unsuccessfully tried to get the book translated into French and published in early 1929. But, to learn about what Fuller did at Stockade, his circle of associates, and what else he did in the 1920s besides design the Dymaxion House, this book is the source. It even covers a little bit of the early 1930s. It is also nice because it offers new information on Fuller that is not found elsewhere and doesn't repeat most of the same information found in almost every other book on Fuller. Since her focus is on Fuller's efforts to get the Dymaxion House into production, Lorraine doesn't include the various towered versions of the house because he wasn't trying to get those into mass-production. She does include some very early sketches from a manuscript (not seen elsewhere) that relate to the patent design and then the final version of the house. She also discusses who helped Fuller develop the final version of the house. The book is about Fuller's development and how the projects fit into that development, it's not a study of the projects, a plethora of which can be found elsewhere. The book gives a convincing discussion of the popularity of the Dymaxion House model and that it was tossed out as garbage in 1939. There is an abundance of quotes allowing the reader to follow the process as it happened instead of how the author interprets it. For example, there are exchanges between Fuller and his father-in-law discussing Fuller's ousting from Stockade and his efforts to get the AIA to take over responsibility of the Dymaxion House development. Lorraine included some juicy footnotes as well, like the one listing what things happened on Fuller's birthday in various years (he was married and his father died) and noting that Fuller had many affairs. While some readers may take issue with a few details, the book seems

solidly researched. To me there were no glaring errors like the one in Krausse and Lichtenstein's book that claims "4D Timelock" "pronounces against industrial construction" (p. 28). For someone looking for new information, the influences on Fuller's early development and a clear analysis of his early work, this book is the one to read. It's strange that Micheal Lewis in the Wall Street Journal review claimed there is nothing new here and he even seemed disappointed that the book didn't trash Fuller. It's also surprising Jaimie Snyder echoed Lewis's claim that there is nothing new since the Fuller Estate considered not giving Lorraine permission to publish the material it holds in copyright, like quotes and images. Some people might find her re-evaluation of Fuller's biography and the notion of his personal myth troubling, but, the reassessment is based on material from Fuller's papers. If Fuller didn't want this story told, it's surprising he kept the papers that contradict the well-known fairy tale about how he came to design the Dymaxion House. It also adds new materials to Fuller studies and more room for discussion. It is true that the political and historical implications are yet to be fleshed out. I highly recommend it.

Buckminster Fuller's fame reached its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, when his visionary experiments struck a chord with the counterculture and his charismatic personality provided the media with a good story--that of a genius who could play the role of artist, scientist, and entrepreneur all at once. In *Becoming Bucky Fuller*, Loretta Lorraine shows that Fuller's career did not begin with the lofty goals hailed by his admirers, and that, in fact, Fuller's image as guru and prophet was as carefully constructed as a geodesic dome. Fuller (1895-1983) determined early on how the story of his life in the 1920s and 1930s should be portrayed. But, drawing on a close reading of Fuller's personal papers (in particular, the multivolume scrapbook, *Chronofile*), Lorraine looks at Fuller's first independent project, the Dymaxion House, and finds that what really happened differs from the authorized version. According to Fuller himself and most secondary sources, after a series of personal crises in the 1920s--including the death of his young daughter, thoughts of suicide, and a "year of silence" during which he pondered his purpose in life--Fuller resolved to devote himself to the betterment of society by offering the public economical, efficient, modern manufactured housing. But the private papers tell a different story; one of his initial motivations for designing the Dymaxion House was simply to make money from its manufacture. When that didn't work, Fuller began to emphasize its possibilities rather than its practicalities. By the mid-1930s, Lorraine shows, Fuller the public figure had gone from being an entrepreneur with a product to being a visionary with an idea. He had become Bucky Fuller.

From *Publishers Weekly* Lorraine's revisionist book zooms in on the crucial late 1920s and early '30s when Buckminster Fuller worked on a project for industrially produced housing that eventually came to be known as the Dymaxion House. Lorraine, an architectural historian at New York's School of Visual Arts, has studied the many volumes of Fuller's famously unreadable diary, the *Chronofile*, along with his wife's diary, and both Fuller's own business records and those of his previous employers. Fuller's houses were designed as hexagonal structures, clad in glass and metal and held in tension by piano wire. As Lorraine shrewdly shows, Fuller was an early master of the art of spin, and Lorraine illustrates his frequent manipulation of early biographers in ways that insured his struggles were viewed as those of a misunderstood underdog. In fact, says Lorraine, much of his technology was not considered original enough to earn patent protection, and the American Institute of Architects never endorsed the project. Once Fuller realized the house would not be built, he took the advice of the publicity director at Marshall Fields and renamed it the Dymaxion House, the House of the Future. Fuller's career as visionary had begun. 66 illus. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Becoming Bucky Fuller is an intellectual experiment singular enough to have pleased the prodigious polymath himself. By refusing the biographical conventions Fuller forged into his own life story, Loretta Lorraine demonstrates how in the late 1920s he formulated not only the Dymaxion House, but his own public persona as well. Based on close readings of deep archival research, *Becoming Bucky Fuller* makes clear that one more item must be added to the long list of Fuller's inventions: himself."--Sandy Isenstadt, *History of Art*, Yale University Everything in this book is illuminating. As Loretta Lorraine reveals long before Bucky Fuller became a 'visionary' his life struggles in the hard-knocks business world of the 1920s shaped both his autobiography and his brilliant contributions to American modernism. (Carol Willis, Director, The Skyscraper Museum) About the Author Loretta Lorraine is an architectural historian. She teaches in the School of Visual Arts in New York. Loretta Lorraine is an architectural historian. She teaches in the School of Visual Arts in New York City.