
R. Buckminster Fuller is being rediscovered by a new generation, fascinated with his designs, inspired by his utopian views, and intrigued by his eccentric personality. A cult has formed around him, and publications about him have become an industry in themselves. Yet, New Views on R. Buckminster Fuller manages to add to the serious literature on Fuller, balancing his known contributions with new interpretations of his ideas. In part, this is due to the fact that the editors are very familiar with the Fuller Archive. Now an assistant professor at San Francisco State University, Hsiao-Yun Chu was assistant curator of the archive. Roberto G. Trujillo is head of the Library’s Special Collections. Additionally, the format of the book—individual papers each focusing on an aspect of Fuller’s work—allows for in-depth coverage. The selection of the authors and their well-formulated theories furthers Fuller scholarship.

Barry Katz reinforces some of the commonly held ideas about Fuller—a man out of time and an inventor without the requisite technical knowledge. He states that “Bucky did not suffer from a failure of vision” but rather from the inability to make concessions. Katz further states that the voluminous documentation that is the Fuller Archive does not support Bucky’s 1927 claim of a deliberate plan to conduct his life as an experiment in how much one man might effect. Howard Segal discusses Fuller as a utopian, noting that Fuller was rare in bridging the gap between those writing about utopia and those attempting to build it. He notes, that only at the end of his life, did Fuller understand the difficulties surrounding his utopian vision.

Subsequent essays touch on aspects of Fuller’s work from his ideas to his built works. Joachim Krausse takes on the interpretation of “Lightful Houses” and declares that design and discourse must be seen together. He states that Fuller “developed a notion of the house as a system of environmental controls.” Jonathan Massey, a Claude Bragdon scholar, concludes that Fuller was able to synthesize his technocratic commitment to efficiency through the use of geometry. Maria Gough looks back on the 1959 MOMA exhibition of Fuller’s work and the corresponding issues concerning authorship of the principle of tensegrity. Claude Lichtenstein investigates Fuller’s ideas for house building and dwelling and states that “Fuller’s concept of shelter differed from both the European image of a vanguard architecture and the image of American-inspired rationalization and mechanization. His project had spiritual roots in America itself...” David Nye’s essay examines Fuller’s belief in natural energy as a way for all humanity to prosper, and Fred Turner’s explores how Fuller became the “darling” of the counterculture. The book concludes with Felicity Scott and Reinhold Martin investigating Fuller’s later life and how politics and the World Games played a role in securing his future.

This book is to be recommended for its scholarship and the manner in which it situates Fuller in terms of past and present social and cultural history.

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