

A “Secondhand” Reflection of R. Buckminster Fuller and Peter London ¹

By Dr. Jon Daniel Davey

Over forty years ago I found myself drafted in the US Army, stationed at Grafenwoehr Germany Tank Grounds. While there was not a lot to do, the base had a coffeehouse where one could have great conversations and enjoy a good cup of coffee. The coffee house was decorated with various posters. One of those posters caught my eye, it was of a dandelion with the following quote from R. Buckminster Fuller (1971), “God, to me, it seems, is a verb not a noun, proper or improper” (p. 23). A more exhaustive definition of this quote can be found in *No More Secondhand God*:

Here is God’s purpose – For God, to me, it seems, is a verb not a noun, proper or improper; is the articulation not the art, objective or subjective; is loving, not the abstraction “love” commanded or entreated; is knowledge dynamic, not legislative code, not proclamation law, not academic dogma, nor ecclesiastic cannon. Yes, God is a verb, the most active, connoting the vast harmonic reordering of the universe from unleashed chaos of energy. And there is born unheralded a great natural peace, not out of exclusive pseudo-static security but out of including, redefining, dynamic balancing. Naught is lost. Only the false and nonexistent are dispelled (Fuller, 1971, p. 23).

With the spring of 1976 came my first opportunity to hear R. Buckminster Fuller (better known as “Bucky”) speak at Shylock Auditorium. His reputation for giving long lectures was apparent. The lecture was exhaustive, lasting some six hours! After my stint in the military, traveling around Europe, I finished a Bachelor’s degree in architecture; later moving on to a Master’s degree of Environmental Design, studying in the same design department where Bucky once taught (from 1960 to 1971). The first course in the graduate program was general systems theory. This was “systems thinking.” In “Learning Tomorrow: Education for a Changing World,” in *Buckminster Fuller on Education*, Bucky (1979) quotes the natural philosopher Professor Percival Bridgman, who asked, “How do you suppose it happened that Einstein surprised all the scientists? Why were all the scientists caught off

¹ The following was presented as a Power Point presentation at an art symposium, honoring the work of Dr. Peter London and the opening of his collected papers and Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

guard?” (p. 169). Professor Bridgman concluded – quotes Bucky – that “the reason that Einstein caught all the scientist off-guard was that Einstein was what Bridgman called ‘operational;’ that is, he considered and paid complete attention to all the circumstances surrounding any scientific discovery. He did not isolate the discovery, but paid attention to all the circumstances of its occurrence” (p. 161).

The education that I was acquiring in the school of design was Bucky's Comprehensive Anticipatory Design Science. Design Science is a problem solving approach which entails a rigorous, systematic study of the deliberate ordering of the components in our universe. Fuller believed that this study needs to be comprehensive in order to gain a global perspective when pursuing solutions to problems humanity is facing.

One unique aspect of Bucky's work was his desire to provide a solution for world housing. The solution that Bucky identified was the geodesic dome. In 1954 Bucky acquired the first US patent on the geodesic dome. The first demonstration of the dome occurred at the Italy Triennale 1954.

Bucky referred to himself as guinea pig B, always employing his own solutions in his own life. Thus, in April 19, 1960, with the help of students, he constructed his first and only dome home at 407 S. Forest St. Carbondale, Illinois. Bucky's dome home was erected in one day.



In the Western world we consider the dome to be a unique piece of architecture, so much so that what we cherish the most, what we prize, we place in the dome. At Delphi, where the psychics resided, the initiation Temple is the dome. The Pantheon built by the Romans under Hadrian was a structure that one could place a 140 foot diameter sphere inside. Within that space one could pray to one of seven gods: Mars if you're going to fight somebody; Venus if you are in love; and if you didn't know who to pray to you could pray to all. Hagia Sophia, finished in 537 CE, represents Christianity under the rule of Justinian and

Theodora. The Dome of the Rock was the location where Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac only to be saved by a lamb caught in thistles. The site was later recognized as the location where Mohammed ascended into heaven.

With the collapse of Constantinople in 1440 there was a need for a new structure to house Christianity, that being St. Peters Basilica in Rome. With the rise of the Enlightenment, St. Genevieve in Paris (The Pantheon) was completely designed to honor man's reason. Upon the death of his beautiful wife giving birth to their 14th child, Taj Mahal was constructed. When Jefferson designed the Rotunda at the University of Virginia, it was the library, or, as Francis Bacon commented "Knowledge is Power." The Capital of the United States is in the likeness of the Roman pantheon with the 140 foot diameter rotunda; half domes represent the Senate and the House with the hope that the two would work together so as to metaphorically construct a single dome. And finally we arrive at the National Archives. The structure from the exterior looks like a Greek temple but once inside the interior is a dome housing our most cherished documents, including the Bill of Rights.



Bucky's Haven at Campus beach Southern Illinois University Carbondale. (Davey, 2016)



Above: Gaia Dome covering the Peace Labyrinth. (Davey, 2016)

Below: Quigley Dome at the School of Architecture Southern Illinois University Carbondale (Buhman, 2010)



The *Ten Books on Architecture* (1960) is a treatise on architecture written by the Roman architect and military engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio. In that text Vitruvius comments to Cesar the way to judge good architecture is by *Firmitas*, *Utilitas*, *Venusta*. In other words, the structure should be constructed soundly (*Firmitas*), should be functional (*Utilitas*), and give one visual delight (*Venusta*). Fuller (1979) commented, “Omniconsiderate, comprehensive, synergetic integrity will be the aesthetic criteria, and its humanly evolved designs will come to do so much with so very little as to attain the ephemeral beauty heretofore manifest only by nature in the formation of flowers, crystals, stars, and the pure love of a child” (p. 160). Fuller continued, “When I am working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think only on how to solve the problem. But when I am finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong” (p. 34). Peter London (1989) commented on beauty,

The term beauty refers to a quality of human activity, natural objects, and events. Art is the making of expressive symbols, something all humans do spontaneously and for the most part effortlessly. In contrast to the natural case of image making, the making of beautiful objects requires a level of skill and knowledge that only a few people who attempt to capture the beautiful ever do so. Beauty is cherished in part because it is so rare, so difficult to achieve, and so elusive (pp. 19-20).

Further, London (1989) purported two basic stances to life and art

The first stance in response to life may be described as one of acquisitiveness. From this perspective, the world is perceived as something like a giant department store and the aim of the enterprise (life) is to accumulate as many things as we can before the closing buzzer sounds...Rather than the world conceived as a department store and the self as a supershopper, the other stance in response to life is the one that creative people tend to take. This perspective takes life to be not so much a place but an endless dance and the self to be a dancer with an endless stream of partners, bidden and unbidden, who appear, then disappear, only to have the next appear. Each partner asks, ‘Will you dance?’ With each partner there is different music, and a different setting. Will you dance? Will you dance the same way you did before with your new partner and to new music? Will you sit this one out? Will you seek out your next partner? Will you wait to be asked? Will you request new music? Will you try a new step? Will you? Won’t you? Will you join the dance? (pp. 184-185).

References

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