

Letter to World Citizens

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Homage to a Prophet

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Next year is R. Buckminster Fuller's centennial.

Born July 12, 1895, the inventor of the geodesic dome and numerous other insightful artifacts was more than an architect, an inventor, a gadgeteer, a writer, a lecturer, a teacher. Bucky Fuller was primarily a humanitarian, even a "cosmicarian," if I may be permitted a neologism.

Indira Gandhi, introducing Fuller to a gathering of Indian scientists, claimed that his "obsession" was "with the architecture of the universe." Fuller has shown, said the late prime minister, "how to get the maximum from the minimum of material and the most intelligent use of the available resources on earth."

Bucky himself said that he was born with a "handicap": far-sightedness.

"It is synergy which holds the earth together with the moon," he told his students, "and it is synergy which holds our whole universe together."

His geodesic dome introduced the word "tensegrity," stemming from the idea that nature exists in an equilibrial balance between the forces of compression and tension. The eminent cybernetician Stafford Beer, in his forthcoming book, "Beyond Dispute," writes that "when a good case for a natural variant is presented, we are entitled to be excited by a possible advance in human understanding of the natural world and to seek further examples."

I was intrigued with Fuller's example of what he called "World One, World Two, World Three, and World Four." No other illustration, in my opinion, demonstrates so clearly the magnitudes of change our world has been undergoing since pre-history. It is worth recounting briefly here.

"World One" was represented by a blank piece of paper. The invisible dots, Fuller explained, represented the location of one percent of mankind during the era when the people most remote from each other were unable to make contact during their lifetime using the only means then available to them: walking.

"World Two" was illustrated by a map projection arranged in its ocean configuration. Each small, but visible, dot represented the location of one per cent of humanity who were about six months apart via the fastest means then available: sailing ships. This world existed from about the 16th century until World War I.

"World Three" was the more familiar "Air-Ocean" configuration, one contiguous land island in an ocean of air. Here, each somewhat larger dot represents the location of one per cent of mankind in the era when the most remote people were less than 48 hours away. This world existed from about World War I until the mid-1970s.

"World Four" was again represented by a blank piece of paper. Bucky would point out that each invisible dot represents the location of one percent of humankind in the era when the most remote people are only one-quarter of a second away: via satellite video-communication.

The extraordinary changes in proximity as humankind progresses from World One to World Four are of the following magnitudes:

* From World One to World Two — a lifetime down to about six months, representing a 35-to-1 reduction;

* From World Two to World Three — about six months down to 48 hours or less, representing a 90-to-1 reduction;

* From World Three to World Four — 48 hours to one-quarter of a second, representing a reduction of over 600,000-to-1!

In other words, if you and I, no matter where we are, are only a quarter of a second apart, what does that say about our “differences,” our cultures, our skin color, our religion, our nationality?

It should be obvious, wrote Bill Perk, coordinator of the World Design-Science Commission, who worked with Bucky Fuller on the World Game, “that we have entered an era that will be qualitatively different from any that have gone before. As our circumstances are new, so our thinking must be new.”

I highly recommend Fuller’s brilliant “Critical Path” to you, along with “Utopia or Oblivion” in which he writes in enlightened, forceful prose of changing the world from “weaponry to livingry.”

Fuller’s centennial affords us the renewed opportunity to fulfill his prophecy that the human race can surmount its problems through synergetic awareness of our common destiny on our common Spaceship Earth.
