

## R. Buckminster Fuller – My Hero

by John Kuti

Buckminster Fuller is a hero of mine, and I hope, after reading this, he'll become one of yours too.

In 1927 he was desperate. He had no money and didn't know how he could provide for his wife and their newly born daughter. He had lost his job in a company that made lightweight building materials. We find him standing on the shores of Lake Michigan about to throw himself into the water and die. Luckily for us, instead of doing that, he started thinking differently. Some people say that this was a religious experience but it's not so clear what Bucky himself would say about that. He said that up until that moment he had lived according to the advice of other people, he had played somebody else's game. After it, he began an experiment to live the rest of his life as Guinea Pig B – in the service of humanity. He decided first of all that he would stop talking, at least for a while – until he knew exactly what he wanted to say. For the next two years he didn't speak to anyone, except his wife Anne – who understood and supported his idea. He also decided to stop worrying about earning a living and make his purpose instead "to prove how very good the invention of man is". He decided that he had to use his own abilities to the maximum and to do what "needed to be done by the world to help the world be successful". From that moment he always thought of the world as a whole, either as a "one-town world" or as "spaceship Earth".

His first work was applied to houses and cars – redesigning them in revolutionary ways. He designed the first aerodynamically-shaped car and a house which was supported by being pulled up from the top like a tent. This was a logical way for him to approach humanity's problems considering his experience. He knew a lot about building materials. Houses and cars represent the two things that Americans buy which cost the most money. Mass production of houses seemed a reasonable idea when you look at how successful mass production of cars has been. His last prototype for a mass-produced home was designed with financial support from the US Air Force and completed in 1944. 37,000 people ordered one but, for some reason, the factory necessary to build the components was never made. Later he got more interested in more theoretical and abstract things like geometry. These led him to his most famous invention: the geodesic dome. You probably have seen one of these even if you don't know its name... hundreds of thousands have been built - they are a spherical shape but made out of straight rods that join up in triangles.

From the age of 32, Buckminster Fuller kept up his experiment to help the world until he died – without trying to make money for himself or the investors who sometimes supported his projects. How successful was he? He kept a complete record of every idea and every piece of correspondence, in that scientific sense he was true to his word. He left us a complete record of his life as "Guinea Pig B". This includes a very long film from 1975 of him speaking in 42 hours of lectures where he summarised everything he knew. By then he had become famous and spent most of his time travelling around the world giving lectures on his ideas – and these were beginning to seem much more important and realistic. He was one of the first people to talk about the limits of natural resources and to argue for renewable energy sources. I think his proposals are reasonable, that is to say, that we could design a world where no-one has to worry about earning a living: where a home, food, energy and interesting information is supplied efficiently to everyone. If you look at the same information as him you might be quite optimistic about it happening. For example, he said that when he was born 95% of people were illiterate, now that figure is only about 20%. During his life, the aeroplane and radio were invented, and industrialisation spread round the world. The key things that he thought needed to be done were to transfer effort from war to peace and to make technology more efficient – using less energy and less materials.

Bucky should be a model for everybody, but not a person we should think of as special or better than us. As he said himself: "if there is anything important about me at all, it is that I am a demonstration of what an average, healthy human being can do if he is disembarassed of the nonsense that he has to earn a living, and really commits himself to what the Universe is trying to do."