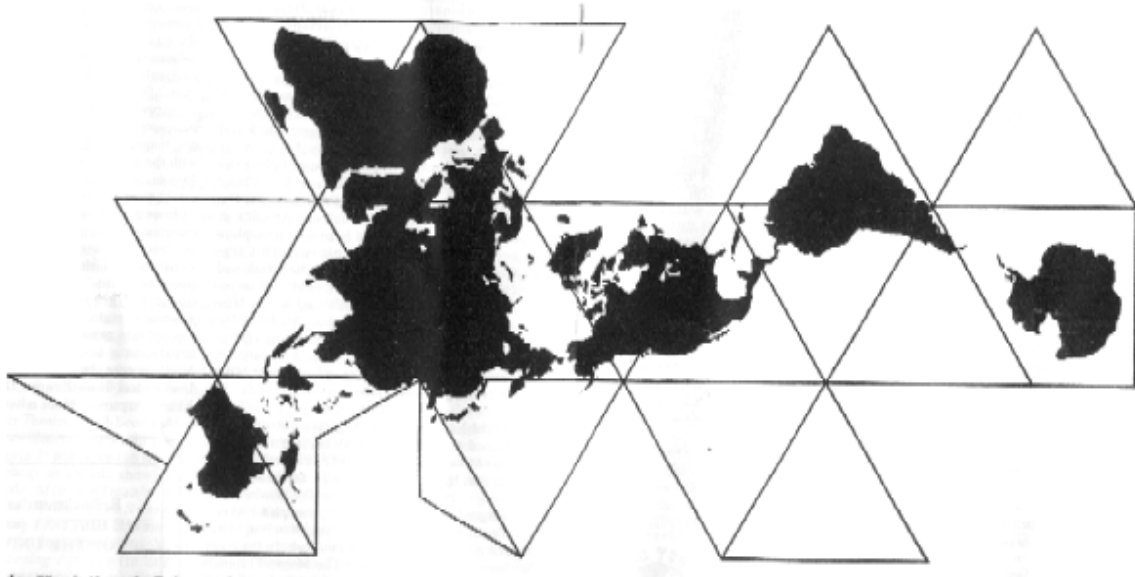


HISTORY AND MYSTERY OF THE UNIVERSE

GEORGE COATES PERF. WORKS, 12-16-2000

Written and Directed by D.W. Jacobs
From the life, work and writings of R. Buckminster Fuller
Performed by Ron Campbell



This weekend, the "History and Mystery of the Universe" captured the stage at George Coates Performance Works. This one-man show presenting the life and ideas of Buckminster Fuller was, funnily enough, the most low-tech performance ever presented in this space, relying on simple backdrop projections and the simple wit and talent of actor Ron Campbell. Some of the same thematic motifs that seem to inhabit all of the productions at Coates PW cropped up in more humanistic ways that previously presented: ticking timepieces, man as organic machine, and zen motion. In one of the more interesting moments, the decidedly Victorian-mannered actor glides from a lecture on metaphysics into a

Tai chi sequence without a hitch, then resumes. There were, unfortunately, far too few such moments, as the work descended to unfortunate sentiment while at the same time appealing to "Synergy" in a manner that reminded one uncomfortably about the existence of a Dianetics Institute across the street.

Critics have been unanimous in their praise for this production. *The Chicago Sun Times* proclaimed the production as "Magnificent! Fervent, funny, heart-wrenchingly poignant, and impeccably detailed - A tour de force!" *The Los Angeles Times* wrote: "physical, metaphysical, intellectual, eclectic, challenging and hugely entertaining!" In San Francisco, the *Chronicle* enthused: "Ron Campbell gives a generous, expertly timed and lively performance as the renowned engineer and philosopher, with none of the self-indulgence often found in other one-man shows," and *the San Francisco Examiner* described it as "Startlingly funny, intellectually stimulating, and genuinely moving!"

Fuller, a sort of Everyman's genius whose ideas were heavily inflected with Presbyterian religiosity was among the first to conceive of a global economy, and his ideas about universal structural forms equalled those of theoretical mathematicians who had many more decades of academic learning than this Harvard dropout. Einstein endorsed his writing and gave the man the benefit of a personal one-on-one meeting at a time when the German physicist was deluged with appeals. That the performance fails to bridge the gap between the hard and inflexible concepts of structural physics and the airy flights of metaphysical fancy cannot be the fault of the playwright or actor, for Fuller, born in 1894, could not have ever incorporated both the establishment of Einsteinian relativity as well as

the diametrically opposed quantum theory, which came to supercede Einstein's ideas, coupled with the chaos theory that now preoccupies the minds of physicists today.

Um, but the play gets you thinking, I guess. Which is never a bad thing and certainly a hallmark of what happens in the space at GCPW.

