Too Fast to be Fat

by Daniel Passamaneck

It has been, simultaneously, too long, not long enough, and exactly the right amount of time since I last made free to answer one of our mad world's innumerable impossible questions. That makes this a good time to do it again, and also to define my terms. By “impossible question,” I do not mean the sort of question that any fixated yutz could answer with unlimited quantities of some given resource, like time or patience or woodchucks or such. Those questions are inconvenient, but they are not impossible, and that means that they are beneath me. Let the well-provisioned yutz pursue those baubles of wisdom for him- or herself. I am here to answer questions they'd never even be able to fit inside their yutzik crania.

I'm also not here to answer the merely personal question. Seriously, people. Talk to each other. Sterilize your turkeybaster. Get your own damn bariatric chamber. I'm the guru of the impossible question, sugarsnap - I'm not your mother.

So, today's impossible question comes to us from the annals - quiet, you - of quantum physics. This is, as any troglodyte with an abacus can tell you, that branch of fluxions pertaining to the bits of reality that are changing too fast for the proper application of regular fluxions. It tends to take into consideration extreme circumstances and potentially variable outcomes. Things don't always have one answer in the quantum. Most people are afraid of it. Today I will answer an impossible question about the quantum. In so doing I will make the quantum my bitch. You may wish to get yourself a wetnap in advance. It'll be that good.

Quantum physics, or “quanties,” as we of the inner echelon know it, began when a certain supergenius asked how the universe might appear were he riding on a beam of light. From this he figured out how to use a rock to provide most of France with electricity. Along the way he realized that, were he to ride that beam of light, time in the realm we typically inhabit would, for him, just stop, and our mass would become infinite.

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Even non-supergeniuses will probably recognize that this would be a very unfortunate combination of extremes: frozen in time, infinitely massive. It brings up a question even Einstein himself declined to confront: ***If I were to ride on a beam of light, would it make my ass look big?***

Damn good question, Einstein. With infinite mass and time at a standstill, it might be objectively unflattering to find yourself riding around on a beam of light if you're also wearing dolfin shorts and a wifebeater. (Hence Einstein's own patented “rumpled professor” look (patent pending)). Let's take an analytical approach and uncover the truth. It may hurt, but you probably deserve it.

Perspective, of course, is paramount. From where, specifically, might your butt look, potentially, big? (The potential (P) for the outcome (B = big-looking butt) is detailed in the quantum koan of Schrodinger's Cat's Half-Fat Cat Ass.) Three points of view are relevant to this analysis. Let us attack them, as is my wont, seriatim:

Your point of view: Would you, yourself, think your butt looked big? Probably not. You, the beam of light (let's call it “Beamie"), the pants or, perhaps, bridesmaid's gown you are wearing, and, of course, your potentially fat-looking mudflaps, are all moving at the exact same speed. This is to say, relative to each other, they are motionless. Under such conditions, general relativity and Pythagorean physics prevail. Unless your ass is literally big enough to generate its own gravity field, it shouldn't look any different to you while you're riding along on Beamie than it usually does. And if your butt is gravitationally huge, it's not ol' Beamie making you look bad. I'm just saying.

My point of view: You. Are. Kidding. Like I don't have better things to look at than your quantum rumproll? Not my bag, man. I don't give a rat's ass how wide your undercarriage rides, regardless how fast you're moving. Get over yourself, dude. We're all perfect just as we are. Namaste. But that doesn't really address the conundrum I vowed to resolve, so let's move on.

The objectively motionless observer's point of view: This is the observer who is motionless relative to the place where Beamie

originated. ("Beamie" is starting to sound a little condescending, actually. He's a frickin' beam of visible electromagnetic radiation traveling 186 thousand miles per second, and he's tough enough to haul around your apparently potentially fat-looking butt, too. He deserves a little respect.) ANYway, the motionless observer might look up at an opportune moment, just as you ride past on your beam of light. How big, relative to a hypothetical motionless posterior doppelganger, would your butt look?

As it turns out , hypertravel is surprisingly slimming. As an object approaches speeds approaching that of light, our view of that object grows increasingly distorted. Let's not crap around with Doppler effects. Meterology has irretrievably sullied them for me, but more importantly, our discourse does not touch upon mere sublight speeds. Commodore Beamington Photonray (no that's no good either) doesn't lollygag at anything less than C, as in the square root of E/M.(footnote)

So let's move directly to the key analysis: At light speed, your butt would barely even be visible as it traversed the visual field of a relatively stationary observer. Edge on, as one sees traffic on the street, your butt will pass too quickly for a photon to reach it and bounce back to an observer to be perceived. You will actually experience buttly motion in the mere amount of time it takes for light to bounce off your mooncakes, producing an incoherent image in which rearmost portions might appear closer - itself an effective caboose obfuscator. During its approach toward the observer, your butt would be invisible because no information about it could reach the observer before your butt itself does. And going away, your butt would be shrinking at an amazing rate, which is never a problem. From the perspective of the stationary observer, your butt, riding on a beam of light, looks *fabulous.*

However, that stationary observer will probably appear to you frozen in space and infinitely massive. So if you decide to ride the lightbeams, bring a camcorder because you could probably get some really embarrassing shots to post on your facebook (or “myspace” as you may prefer). Now that's useful advice.

As always, I invite the submission of other truly impossible questions so I can answer them for you. Give me a challenge. Life is either groceries or art, n'est pas?

footnote: E = MC2
E/M = C2
square root of E/M = C
(crowd goes wild!)