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NEWS FROM AN EMERGING CULTURE



Your 3-D Universe Is So Passé

A new way of looking at reality stretches the mind into multiple dimensions.

HERE'S A RIDDLE FOR YOU: What has lines, splits, and folds and is inconceivably bigger than the known universe? Give up? Why, it's the ten-dimensional *multiverse*, of course.

Over the past decade, the idea that we live in a cosmos consisting of more than the usual three spatial dimensions (length, width, and depth) has been inching its way ever further outside the bounds of science fiction. Promoted by brilliant, charismatic physicists such as Columbia University's Brian Greene and Harvard's Lisa Randall, theories suggesting the existence of ten, eleven, or possibly twenty-six dimensions seem to be gaining increasing shelf space in the science sections of major bookstores every year. Indeed, *The*

Elegant Universe, Greene's 1999 popular treatise on string theory (also known as M-theory)—which is the reigning contender among physicists for a multidimensional "theory of everything"—spent six months on the *New York Times* bestseller list and was even made into a two-part PBS television special.

But to those of us not up to speed on the finer points of theoretical physics, what could it mean for there to be *ten* or more dimensions? Most of us probably have trouble describing the three we commonly experience (to say nothing of that ever-elusive fourth dimension, *time*). Wouldn't the attempt to picture even higher dimensions of space and time paralyze the minds of all but the greatest scientists, mathematicians, and die-hard fans of *The*

Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension? Well, maybe. Seeking to somehow reassure the rest of us, Randall said during an interview conducted by Charlie Rose last December, "The fact that you can't picture [a higher dimension] doesn't mean that you can't *imagine* it."

And if that doesn't instantly clarify things, here to save the day is Canadian music producer and composer Rob Bryanton, a self-described "non-scientist with an inquisitive mind" and author of *Imagining the Tenth Dimension: A New Way of Thinking about Time and Space*.

WIE first learned of Bryanton's work when an intrepid reader sent us a link to his website, www.tenth-dimension.com, which serves as an

entertaining and interactive promotional vehicle for his book. Winner of a W³ Award for web creativity in 2006, the highlight of the site is a delightfully lucid Flash animation that, in less than twelve minutes, takes the viewer step by step from dimension zero (a single point) to dimension ten (another point), explaining how each successive dimension builds and expands on the dimensions below it. The triple pattern of "a line" (first, fourth, and seventh dimensions), "a split" (second, fifth, and eighth dimensions), and "a fold" (third, sixth, and ninth dimensions) elegantly

**Some believe
UFOs, ghosts, and
other paranormal
phenomena are the
best evidence we
have that higher
dimensions exist.**

repeats itself three times, expanding the scale of reality by mind-boggling orders of magnitude at each step. And by the time we arrive at the tenth dimension, which comes across as a kind of Teilhardian Omega Point encompassing absolutely every possible timeline of every possible universe, "there's no place left to go."

While it would take too long to explain its details here, the simplicity of Bryanton's ten-dimensional model is striking, and he points out at the beginning of his book that what he's proposing has little to do with the incredibly intricate mathematical formulas comprising the theories espoused by Greene, Randall, and other professional physicists. His multiple dimensions are purely speculative and built on logical consistency, requiring nothing more

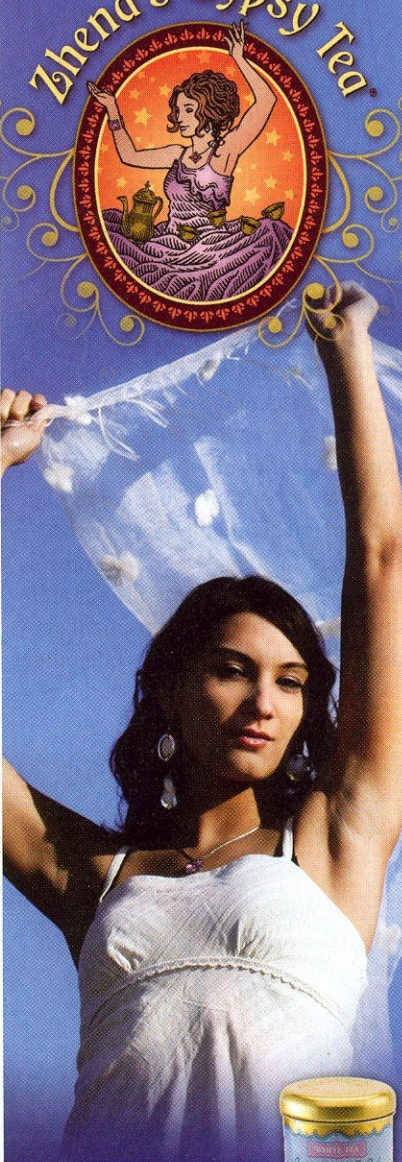

than a basic grasp of high school geometry to understand. "Despite that," he writes, "I would ask the reader to keep an open mind: sometimes, simple is better. I will argue . . . that this 'simple' viewpoint has many fascinating connections, not just to leading-edge string theory and physics, but also to the average person's commonsense knowledge of how the world really works."

His argument hangs together surprisingly well, testifying to the more than two decades of thought he put into his model before revealing it to the world. In chapters with such diverse titles as "The Quantum Observer," "The Paradoxes of Time Travel," and "Memes, Music, and Memory," Bryanton's multidimensional matrix manages to make sense out of more mysteries than any one theory should justly be able to handle. Yet he also makes it clear throughout his personable and reader-friendly text that the implications of this "new way of thinking about time and space" have barely begun to be explored.

That's where everybody's favorite parallel universe, the internet, comes into the picture. Besides hosting his animated tour through the ten dimensions, Bryanton's website is home to a lively discussion forum, where a few main topics branch off into innumerable threads that take his 10-D idea in every imaginable direction. Under the "Altered States" category, one can find posts discussing users' experiences of various psychedelic drugs, speculations about the Bermuda Triangle being an interdimensional gateway, and a peculiar discussion about a black brick that spontaneously appeared in one user's living room from out of the blue (or was it the sixth dimension?). Another section of the forum, titled "The Philosophical/Spiritual Implications," involves discussions of reincarnation, fate and

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free will, the existence of God, and the possibility that consciousness spans multiple dimensions, as well as the compelling idea that UFOs, ghosts, and other apparently "paranormal" phenomena may actually be the best evidence we currently have that higher dimensions do exist. (Intriguingly, Bryanton mentions in his book that two of the biggest unsolved mysteries of modern cosmology—the nature of dark matter and dark energy—might also be evidence of the unseen influence of a higher dimension.) Some forum participants have remarked on the similarity between Bryanton's model and the ten *sefirot* of Kabbalah, which represent the hierarchical gradations of divine creation, while others

have suggested that the whole thing is just a novel elucidation of the paradoxical wisdom of Zen.

"I am continually fascinated at the many personal resonances people see in what I'm presenting," Bryanton says. "In some ways, it appears that I have created a mirror which allows many people to see elements of their own belief systems. . . . This reaction has completely exceeded my expectations."

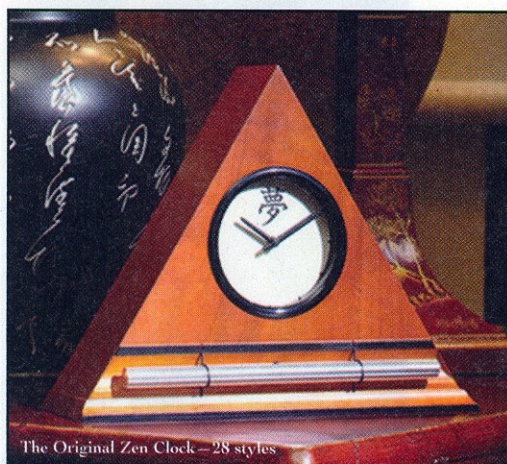
Like the English theologian Edwin A. Abbott's 1884 satirical novella *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, which presents the story of two-dimensional citizen A. Square and his harrowing encounter with a three-dimensional sphere, Bryanton's

Imagining the Tenth Dimension is conveying the concept of alternate dimensions to an audience that might never pick up a book on cosmology, string theory, or quantum geometry. And judging from some of the comments it has been garnering in the blogosphere, it's expanding worldviews, blowing minds, and provoking plenty of philosophical and spiritual inquiry as well.

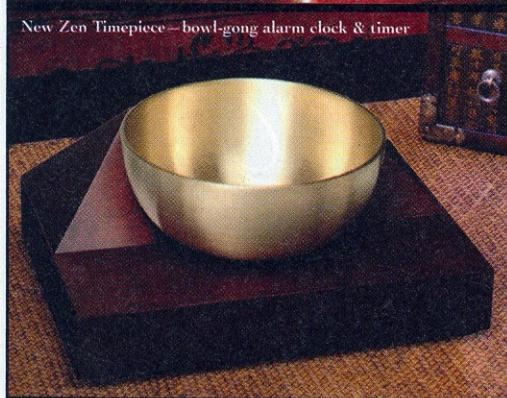
"The line between leading-edge cosmology and some of the oldest philosophical questions ever asked," Bryanton observes, "is sometimes a thin one."

But one has to wonder: Is that a line in the first dimension, the fourth, or the seventh? ■

Tom Huston



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