

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT  
recorded interview with B.B. Gunn  
for Manifesto Magazine  
*B.B. Gunn Blows Up*  
5/14/11

MM: Welcome B.B. Gunn, it's nice to finally sit down with you.

BB: Thank you for having me, I'm so excited.

MM: Of course. So let's get to it, tell us a little bit about what you do.

BB: Oh, well I produce work constantly, 24/7 really. It's quite exhilarating.

MM: Uh-huh, I'm sure it's a bit tiring too. We know you do have quite a web presence, but do you show in any galleries? I know you've called yourself a "living sculpture" in the past, so does that mean you're doing gallery performances?

BB: I suppose I do. When I walk into one. You know, I should explain that I use the term "living sculpture" somewhat lightly. When you really get into the philosophy behind that statement, it's actually based on the concept of altering reality. In that sense, I'm a living sculpture not particularly of art, but of an experience of being, a way of thought.

MM: [*laughs*] One minute in and you've already lost me. Why don't we start off light? Can you discuss your costume today? This persona you got going is lookin' pretty wild!

BB: Nope, no persona, just myself. I feel the way I look and act is who I am at my core, rather than who I am through a reactionary filter to the changing environments of home, work, and play. I used to dress to meet a certain standard of a particular stereotype, like the surfer, bro, or artist. Now I just dress in whatever I feel, though there's no real consistency since I like so many different things. It's almost easier since I know I'm giving a more honest representation of myself to the world.

MM: But it's gotta take some work to get dolled up everyday!

BB: I just wake up and pick out something that hopefully looks good. And it usually does. It's no costume, just a style of dressing. You're wearing what you're wearing, which happens to be a style that millions of other people wear, and I'm wearing what I'm wearing, which happens to not be worn by as many people.

MM: Right, but what I'm wearing isn't nearly as elaborate, and I'm not dressed in drag.

BB: First of all, I'm not in drag. Drag is imitating another. I may have long hair and nails, lipstick, jewelry, but I'm identifying as male. By dressing this way, and still presenting myself as male, this becomes men's clothes. This is something a man would wear, because I am a man and I am wearing it.

MM: I wouldn't. I don't think most men would.

BB: That's right, which brings back your earlier comment. You don't think you're dressed elaborately, but you are. You could be naked, but instead you're wearing a full set of clothes, with shoes, and socks, and a watch. Like me, you got up this morning and put on something out of your closet, and they're things that are considered very standard attire. Pre-approved. The way I get dressed may take more time and effort, but only because I'm more conscious of what I put on myself. What you're wearing is elaborate to other cultures, other time periods. So basically we're all in costume. The styles of the "Other" in our culture eventually get filtered through the mainstream market and find their way into department stores. So you could be wearing this in a few years!

MM: I don't know about that. I wake up and put on sweatpants. Barbara our stylist puts me in this.

BB: Well aren't you the everyman? Props to Barbara.

MM: Hmm-mm. So you dress like this everyday? Even during the daytime?

BB: Yeah, of course. I don't care if people roll their eyes; I'm having a good time. This is what I feel comfortable in, though not always literally. You know, I feel style is like a muscle. I don't think anyone wakes up and puts this on. You have to work your way up to it. Sure you can put it on, but then it really is just a "costume" in the Halloween sense. If you start shopping somewhere like a thrift store where you can find everything, of "normal" and "out there" taste, you can tailor a style that's unique to you, without any unconscious interference from the fashion market.

MM: Would you still dress the same way if what you were wearing were considered normal? You wouldn't get as much attention...

BB: Well, if everyone was dressing like themselves, including myself, then that would be a very beautiful thing, wouldn't it? I'd love it if more people dressed in a similar style. I think a lot of people are afraid to express themselves through their clothing. Besides, it's so much easier to go to a chain store and buy whatever's in the window display. I invite everyone to work for his or her look. Show yourself off!

MM: And you really don't consider this a persona?

BB: Honestly, I don't. Look, if this was New York in the late 80's, early 90's, you'd call me a Club Kid and that would be the end of it. All of 'em have already done what I'm doing—tenfold, and it's as if people have totally forgotten. And before them there was Leigh Bowery! It's like you're asking me the same questions he was asked 30 years ago. How is this still shocking? Why are more people not living this way? I'm just being myself, and I'll admit that it takes work, but I feel like I finally understand the saying "be yourself." It's funny how when you actually do it, people don't believe you.

MM: But you said it takes work. If you're really being yourself, shouldn't it come naturally?

BB: No! No, not at all! Yes, it should be easy, but because of the society that we live in, you have to constantly fight against the dominant ideology. Our society wants us to act a certain way because we're easier to manage that way. If we're all a bit dulled down, more or less doing the same thing, sharing the same thoughts, it's easier for the

government to manage us. I'm not saying the government is out to brainwash us, but I believe it's true that society runs smoother when everyone's on the same page. Imagine if we were all operating on our own planes of reality. It would be beautiful in an individualist sense, but as a group, it would be difficult to organize. That's why me acting the way I do, or anyone who branches out from the norm, has to work hard for it, because we receive so much scrutiny for escaping the prefixed mindset, for going against the grain.

MM: But as you just said, it's hard to organize society if everyone is acting separately. Are you wishing for anarchy?

BB: I wish for freedom. Personally, I don't know what the world would look like if we all acted as we truly felt. Some people would probably turn into serial killers, others into a state of Nirvana. Realistically, given our world history, even if we split up into like-minded groups, which would probably eventually develop their own social standards, there would be at least one group determined to wipe out all the others and engage in global warfare. I'd like to think it would turn out better than that, but you never know. That's basically what's happening now anyways, yet few can admit to living their life freely, so why not give it a try?

MM: You keep talking about altered states of reality. What exactly do you mean; are you talking about something like spiritual realms or drug use?

BB: Drugs. All kinds. Everybody take drugs. *[laughs]* No, I'm attempting to express this concept of altering the perception of your own life. Perception of reality varies from person to person, but as a group, we tend to more or less perceive life, and therefore ourselves within it, our personal realities, in a shared manner. If we viewed it differently, we'd all be very confused with one another. It's like if everyone looked at the color red and saw a vast array of different colors and no one could agree on what red looked like. I feel reality is the same way. We have all more or less agreed to what the reality of life feels like, that's why we have social norms. Not only do they help make organization easier, they help keep people's interpretation of reality from getting too far outside the societal standard.

MM: Then what reality do you consider yourself apart of?

BB: Hmm... Well I guess my reality is pretty exciting. I tend to live in the future a lot; it helps me organize the present. The future reality is very busy, very glamorous. The real work comes in when I try to bring that futuristic reality into this one, and remembering that the hard truths of my current existence are going to still be there in the future. So I suppose I'm operating in somewhat of a lucid dream state. My wildest dreams can come true if I allow them to; I just have to will them into being with as much work as it takes. It's hard, but everyday I get to feel like I'm taking a step towards bridging the gap.

MM: What's this future reality like?

BB: Oh it's fantastic. I'm famous, living in New York, surrounded by friends. We all know how to balance work and play, and they all want as much out of life as I do. A few faces from the present day are there. We look at each other and remember how far we've

come, just as you're supposed to when you're livin' life at the top. Basically I'm happy and surrounded by other happy people, living our lives.

MM: [*laughs*] You gotta admit that sounds a little conceited, or something! Not everyone can be famous.

BB: What? Yes they can! I've always wanted to be, and now I am. I suppose it depends on your definition of fame, but no, I believe anyone can be famous if they work for it—sometimes even if they don't. Everyone *wants* to be famous, only a few openly admit it, or at least hold on to the dream long enough.

MM: I don't know about that, I'm sure there are plenty of people who would rather stay out of the media's attention.

BB: Oh please. I think we're all born wanting to be famous, even the shy kids—I *was* a shy kid! I've had the exact same dream I have now for as long as I can remember: I wanted to move to New York City and be Famous. Nothing's changed. I was even giving out my autograph to friends at *four years old*. I hate it when people try to tell me I just wanna be famous because I've been influenced by Warhol, reality TV, Lady Gaga, Hollywood, or money—especially money. This isn't about getting rich, or mimicking what I've seen in magazines, this drive has been in me since birth!

MM: Ok, it may be understandable that you're this way, but again, not everyone is so determined to 'make it big.'

BB: And again, I would say that you're wrong. Ya know what this drive for fame really is? I believe it's our will to power. What's his name...the philosopher guy, uh...Nietzsche! His concept of 'will to power.' I'm interpreting it in both a very broad and specific way, but still, I see fame as power. Personal, social, economical...it allows us to do things we couldn't do in anonymity. When you're famous you can escape various social norms and responsibilities, people want to do things for you without ever having met you, money tends to enter into the picture, and with money comes the ability to follow and or create opportunities for yourself and others. Your life is encapsulated within the media, forever-archived in books, videos, and online, creating an immortal media-self. Who doesn't want to live forever? Who doesn't want all that power? Who doesn't want to be famous?

MM: A lot of people! That's a lot of responsibility, not to mention the danger of abusing it!

BB: Lies! Yes, it can totally be abused, I'm not denying that, but I still believe it's a desire we're born with. How about you, Mr. Interview Man? Here you are, talking to me on camera, getting styled each day, all done up in masculine makeup. I'm guessing McDonald's wasn't hiring, so this was your next most reasonable option? You should know what I'm talking about, or at least be willing to admit to it. As people grow up they eventually grow out of this will to power, telling themselves, or having been told, that achieving it—through fame—is too hard, too childish, too narcissistic. They begin to believe they don't need it, that they don't want it! They start to hate fame, hate power! The public thrives on demonizing celebrities and politicians! Why? Because they feel that they could do it better. If they were on stage, they'd know how to work the crowd,

receive the applause. There wouldn't be pop-culture media sources if the public didn't want to vicariously live through celebrity's fame so much. You can still be happy and fulfilled without fame, but to act like it's some idiotic desire...that's so repressed.

MM: What about fame's dark side? Despite what you say, it's not all glamorous.

BB: Bullshit. Life is as glamorous as you want it to be, fame has nothing to do with it. There is as much of a "dark side" to fame as there is a "dark side" to life in general. It all depends on what you do with your fame, your life, and how you perceive it. What you're talking about, Britney Spears, *TMZ*, invasion of privacy, that's not fame, it's just a facet of it. You wouldn't put Snookie, Obama, and Jesus in the same category, would you? See, I feel the 'fame machine' idolizes celebrity to keep the public entertained, but more importantly, it also demonizes it. The result is the public feeling better about their own plebian life, believing they made the reasonable choice by allowing themselves to be talked down into submission.

MM: Ok, let's say you gain all the fame in the world. What are you going to do with it? Are you trying to critique it in any way?

BB: As I mentioned, I believe there is a 'fame machine' at work. I recognize it for what it is, which is a market, a business. It's brought us to a point, with a big thanks to Paris Hilton, where someone can be famous for being famous. Like I've said, fame is power, influence, it creates familiarity and hopefully likeability with the masses. Fame isn't about making money; it's about making other people money. Fame, if managed correctly, can turn an individual into an object, a brand. With that brand, the celebrity object can act as a face for all kinds of products and causes. They're walking advertisements, who sometimes do something like act in a movie, or appear on TV. Their actual skill set or acting 'craft' is not what's important to the machine, but how that individual can apply their skills to bringing in more revenue for their brand, meaning all the people standing behind them. And ya know what, I'm down with that. Personally, I think it's important to acknowledge fame for what it is—let the masses in on what we're doing. It's not like they'd stop endorsing these celebrities. After all, they still want to be entertained, so it won't matter if they know they're constantly being pitched at—we already are, all the time!

MM: So what exactly do you want to sell?

BB: In essence, I want to share the inner workings of this machine with the public. I want to inform them that anyone of them could be doing what I'm doing, famous in the way that I'm famous. I've tried to explain earlier that anyone can be famous if they work at it, or perceive their life in that way. I want to find a way to spread that idea out. If it means promoting products and creating revenue for the machine that hosts my platform, then I'm willing to go there. And what's so wrong with that? I'm a workaholic, and fame is a full time job. I love to keep moving, keep producing; it makes me feel productive, purposeful. If I had to wake up at 5AM everyday for the rest of my life, it would all be worth it if it meant making it into the office on time, the photo shoot, the interview, the meeting, the flight, the signing, the ceremony, the meet and greet. I want give up every ounce of myself to my work, because that's what makes me happy, so why

not go for it? Forget waking up early; take away my right to sleep at all! I'd still be the luckiest person alive. A full schedule? What a life...

MM: Why do you have to be famous to be busy? Can't you start working more than one job, or better yet, volunteer?

BB: I need to be working from within the machine in order to take full advantage of it. If I'm working in an effort to expose it for what it is, I need the audience's participation. I'm not trying to show the "underbelly" of fame, and if I am, it's so that we can scratch its tummy and laugh about it. Fame isn't scary, it's just another business model, and we can choose to invest in it or not. On the other side of the scale, there's my own personal agenda, which I'll admit to because that's what I'm about. I got ideas; I have things I want to make happen. I want to entertain the public. I want to make clothes, and design jewelry, maybe a little home décor, a fragrance or three. I want to guest host on reality shows, be interviewed on talk shows, host charity gigs, perform in clubs, organize events, be the first male to pose alone on the cover of *Vogue*. I could make female mustaches trendy! In a sense I guess I want to bring back the Club Kid, or at least usher him into the present day. You could say that some of them were just in it for the freedom of expression and the staggering amount of drug use, but clearly I'm not about that. I'm in it for the freedom of expression and the opportunity to share it with others. Let's take the Club Kid model and commercialize it a bit. A little more relatable so that he can draw out the public's eccentricities, maybe push them a little farther than the average celeb. Everyone loves a good party, and I want to be that party on legs.

MM: Ok, ok. So earlier you mentioned that you try to blend this goal oriented-future reality with the present. So what's the present? What's the result of your little reality cocktail?

BB: Well, right now it's pretty glamorous on it's own. I'm pretty busy doing what I enjoy. I'm pretty much booked every night Monday through Saturday. I host a radio show, which has been great for stretching the muscles of my personality, public interaction, and collaborative skills. Twice a week I go to drag bars where I either perform or watch others I know perform. Getting involved with this crowd has been so awesome, it's like a whole subset of people who understand what I'm going after—most of them anyway. Nobody's rich, but we're all dressed up and looking amazing, getting drunk with our free drink tickets. Going on stage for the first time was also a big push in the right direction. I hadn't been on stage since I was in kindergarten, and back then I was petrified. Maybe I kinda still am sometimes, but it's right there where the realities blend. A part of me is too scared to go on stage, and the other part—I suppose the part that lives in the future—tells me to get up there and work towards meeting my goals, to bridge the gap. So I put my head down and push through, then next thing ya know, I'm on stage, half naked, and letting the crowd pour whip cream on my writhing body. It's moments like those, and a ton of smaller ones, where I feel the future really connects with the present and I feel like I've already won at life.

MM: Your idea of winning at life is letting people pour whip cream—

BB: Ok, ok, ok. Yes! Yes it is, because in that moment I'm livin' the dream. I'm on stage, the lights are on me, the little act that I had been planning for weeks is finally

happening, I'm making people laugh, creating a little space in the world where everyone can be happy. Yeah, that's the pinnacle right there. But you know, like I said, it can come in smaller doses too. Like eating fresh figs late at night with a mixed drink in one hand and twirling my long blonde hair in another, talking with my friend about how the world works and why. Figs are so glamorous, ya know? And a French 75 on a Sunday night? It doesn't get any better! I love moments when I can look around and realize that I'm doing something that's straight out of my fame-tastic futuristic reality—bridging the gap!

MM: That's interesting, so you're always looking for these moments then? Or they just happen?

BB: Both. You gotta work to make some of them happen, and you'll find others fall into place. Another part of it is just recognizing them. Walking down the street on a nice day is pretty fancy. Anyone can do that. And if you're like me, you've got a head full of long, black hair flowing in the wind, some stompin' boots, and a beautiful piece of fabric draped around you that floats in the breeze. Anyone can do what I do, and feel as expensive as I do. I feel like a haute couture model struttin' down the sidewalk, looking like I'm going somewhere between a benefit gala and a crack house. It's all about the way you think, what you think. It doesn't really matter what the truth is. Everything's a lie, you just gotta pick what you want out of it and make it true. The more you believe in something, the truer it becomes.

MM: Isn't it true that you're also in the middle of writing your life's story?

BB: Oh yeah, yeah, I'm about halfway done. My memoirs, as I like to call them, they're at around 300 pages right now. The three-part piece begins as a thickly veiled interpretation of Jesus' life, and by the end I'm basically claiming myself to be the Son of God. And I kinda am. Of the Universe at least, I don't like the label God, it's too loaded, and implies that this connecting force or whatever it is, this energy, that It's a He.

Uh-huh. Don't you find any of that incredibly offensive to some people?

BB: You know what I think is offensive? Killing people over differences in religion. That's offensive. Fuck, I *am* God. We all are! This lifetime is what we make of it. We can turn it into heaven or hell, and I believe that decision is made on an individual basis and eventually translates outward and beyond. That's what I'm doin' I guess. That futuristic reality I'm striving for, that's heaven—at least my version of it. And so what if that's what I want my life to be like while I'm living it? People telling me I'm some persona, some character I made up. They don't get it. Where's their heaven? What's their hell like? Mine's entrapment. The idea of it has paralyzed me for as long as I can remember. Whenever I've been in my lowest low, it's because I'm feeling trapped in my own life. In my heaven, as busy as I am, I'm always on the move. Always spawning new ideas, always working with new people, trying to make other people happy so that they can get closer to their own idea of heaven, whether they know it or not. And if I want to wear black lipstick along the way, then I will! That's allowed!

MM: Other than wanting to make others happy, doesn't that seem a bit self-centered to you?

BB: Fuck yeah! It's my life! I wasn't born to live it as someone else. And I wasn't born to go about it half-assed! It's an insult to the Universe, to God, to Whatever, to not steamroll through it. I'm not choosing to live an easy life. I could move inland, buy an affordable house, get a salary job, and spend the rest of my days going to work, coming home, taking the occasional vacation, getting drinks with my friends on Friday night. I could do that, but I wouldn't be hurdling myself towards my full potential. I certainly wouldn't be *happy*. I'm sure there are millions of people that would be, and that's fine by me, the world needs people like that, but I'm not ashamed to say the world needs people like me!

MM: Then what kind of person are you?

BB: I'm a runner. I'm running everyday, out of breath, panting, eyes watering, on the verge of tears—not sure whether I'm happy or sad, just runnin', into this dark—void, ya know? Sprinting blind, ya know? And maybe I'm running towards my idea of heaven, or maybe I'm running away from my version of hell, but at least I'm always in motion, movin' forward. Sometimes I can make things out in the dark, and the closer I get to them the more I can feel the breeze of their success on my face. And when I eventually pass by that something, it's a great feeling. I feel like I just made it through the finish line, but I know that I still got an infinite number of finish lines to go. And each finish line is so sweet that I wouldn't want them to ever stop coming. And ya know, running to get to the next one, even if I have no idea how far away it is, that's pretty nice too. So yeah, that's who I am. That's how I see my life. A big ol' race and I'm the only one in it. How hard can I push myself, and how far will it take me? How can I translate this runner's high to others so that they can feel this good too?

*[BB's heart is ticking loudly]*

MM: Well. I believe we've gone a bit over. By about half an hour I'd bet.

BB: I tend to talk a lot.

MM: No worries, you've certainly given us a lot to think about.

BB: Well I hope so. If anything, people just gotta know that personal freedom is the way to go and that happiness is the meaning of life. I'm serious. If you're happy, you've won. There's nothing stopping you but yourself. As I say in my quote book, "To free yourself, you must let go of everything but yourself." –B.B. Gunn."

MM: Did you just quote yourself?

BB: I did.

MM: That's so meta.

BB: I'm aware.