Interview with ShazDada, Part Two

An excerpt from a longer podcast interview which took place in the living room of Bette B, recorded by ShazDada.

SD: [...] I see. Fascinating. Thank you for updating us on the medical research underway as we speak. The possibility of aggressive trans-species genetic mutation is of course almost too incredible to consider yet here we are. I can say this honestly, I think, for everyone following your story, that it’s a relief the virus is believed to be non-contagious between humans. Not that we wish you to suffer this alone but, you know, it makes a face-to-face interview a lot easier [both laugh]. And thank you again for letting me speak with you in your home. It’s very cozy here. Lots of recycled furniture rather than the molded synthetics I often see in artist’s homes. [pause, clears throat] So, it’s been a few months now since you encountered B⊗B, as you call him?

BB: Yeah, that’s correct. I’ve lost track of time.

SD: So ... I noticed in our email correspondence that you write B⊗B with capital B’s and a slashed O ... what do you call that symbol anyway?
BB: I don’t know really. It’s the international symbol for not-doing. \textit{DO NOT} ... ! I have my own name for it. I call it a “\textit{NOT} or better \textit{NAUGHT}.” [giggling] Equal parts danger and void. It’s edgy don’t you think? I can get lost in the nothingness of that queer-zero placeholder between the Bs. It’s just a fetish I guess. For some it’s shoes, for me it’s palindromes.

SD: So it’s symbolic? Is it a scientific reference or a literary reference? Or maybe a spiritual reference?

BB: I don’t know, I just find it, uhm, yeah, appropriate somehow. I’m really not sure why. Perhaps I do him an injustice to name him, anthropomorphize him, but well, I, uhm, allow myself this indiscretion. I guess it’s a sign of weak personal politics. But now that we speak of it ... I was talking about him to a friend of mine and she immediately associated the name with \textit{Bølle Bob}, an iconic bad boy in Danish children’s culture. There’s a catchy, kitschy tune the kids all sing apparently. [singing]

\begin{verbatim}
Bob Bob Bølle Bob, Bølle Bob Bob.
Bob Bob Bølle Bob, Bølle Bob Bob.
Sticks with you as a nasty little earworm. But I’m wandering a bit here and still do want to address, as I mentioned last time, well I do want to speak about ethics ... yeah ... so can I do that now? Or would you like me to keep singing? [both laugh]
\end{verbatim}

SD: Please, yes, let’s move to the topic of ethics and human relations with the nonhuman.

BB: OK. So I was recently reading a critical essay by a post-humanist scholar, I forget his name, Clark somebody,
anyway it was on Levinas, you know Emmanuel Levinas, the French philosopher of ethics?

**SD:** I’m not familiar with him.

**BB:** Do you want to hear this side story?

**SD:** Sure, if you think it’s relevant to our audience.

**BB:** I can never be sure anything I have to say is of interest but I’ll keep it short [shuffles papers] ... here it is ... it’s only three pages.

**SD:** Great. I’m sure you can translate the philosophical jargon for our listeners.

**BB:** I’ll do my best. So, Levinas writes on his experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi labor camp during WWII. He tells of a dog the captives named “Bobby” and how this animal would greet them every day as they traipsed back and forth from their “day jobs” with a happy bark and wagging tail. “Bobby” was the only living organism in that camp, in that town, that treated the prisoners as human, offered them some residual feeling of existence with his friendly, daily acknowledgement. The point is that even this being the case, Levinas could not grant an inclusive ethical status to any being not human, even this sentient, affectionate dog. It’s a disappointing argument in an otherwise credible body of thought though I have to be upfront and admit I haven’t studied him much.

**SD:** So you disagree with Levinas?

**BB:** Yeah, I do. To deny animals, even plants a place at the ethical table is problematic. Maybe that’s the ground zero of the problem. The Table. The *food* on the table I mean. You know, “we are what we don’t eat” kinda thing.
Anyway, in this century we’re much more comfortable collapsing the hierarchical status of the human species. Epicurus was a precursor of this kind of cosmo thinking as was Whitehead, Alfred, but I won’t go into that now. Remember I told you last time I like him. And of course Isabelle...

**SD:** Right. I suppose this gives our listeners some insight into your views on animal rights.

**BB:** Well, there’s much more to say, it’s a knotty issue, but the analogy of would-be lab rat B⊗B and Bobby the undeserving dog is worth pointing out which is why I mentioned it.

**SD:** Returning to your story ... how have you been spending your time the past few weeks? It’s apparent now that you’re undergoing some striking changes to the human phenotype and I wonder, all my readers and listeners are wondering, how you’re handling this transformation? I must say you seem to be coping rather well.

**BB:** Let’s say I’m handling it. I’m seeing several therapists. One is a GenTel psychologist with ultrasonic hearing capability. He’s helping me control the noise factor. The excess bandwidth of my hearing alone could drive any sane person to distraction. He’s teaching me how to *AD*. That means a-tune and d-stress. That’s how he puts it. I must learn to selectively filter ambient noise – white, pink, brown – all the squeaks, squawks, and buzz of organic and inorganic worlds. I need to zoom in and out of sonic chaos with some semblance of acuity. I see your recorder is a *Zooom*, a zippy name but a misnomer. It can’t do that ... zoom ... Anyway, there’s an exaggerated spatiality to my hearing now. I’ve been intrigued by the Pythagorean notion of the music of the spheres. It’s been long discredited you know, but if you reboot the theory as
vibrations of subatomic strings it gets interesting again. I haven’t yet learned to clearly distinguish between vibrational sources so I can’t say much more about this yet. My ears are still swimming in an undefined soup of sensation. Yet in some perverse way, it’s kinda liberating, being so detached from meaning.

SD: ok but ooops [pen dropping to floor] ... let’s pursue it a bit more in depth before we move on to other adaptations you’re going through. It would seem that the increased auditory sensitivity and your developing sense of smell has upended your everyday coping mechanisms of living in the world. Is that true?

BB: Yes, I haven’t the temperament or stamina to deal with anything other than the sensational right now. My “team” ... the biologists, geneticists, oncologists, internists, epidemiologists, ethologists, psychologists, blah, blah ... assigned to my case are baffled by the speed at which my cells are reorganizing and adapting to the parasite or parasites I’m hosting. They haven’t yet identified them. Apparently I’m one of the more interesting forensic mysteries of the century thus far. Or so they all tell me in an encouraging kind of way. You know, the “You go girl!” kinda talk. But I had to put a limit on the weekly prodding, poking, and scanning at the clinic. My body, my spirit, my psychological disposition are thoroughly done in. I long for the comfort of my own home, burrowing beneath the solace of the bedcovers, hiding from the feeding frenzy of ambitious scientists, bloggers, and the tabloid press. Yourself excluded of course.

SD: Well, thanks for being so candid about your experiences with me and allowing me inside the privacy of your home. But could we stay on topic for a minute. Back to the alterations in your sense of hearing ... You mentioned in a tweet that you can now distinguish frequencies up to
±50 kHz? I did a bit of research on this ... My, that’s seriously denting the ultrasonic bandwidth. What’s it like to hear that high? It must be painful. Actually it’s unfathomable that you’re able to remain sane.

**BB:** As I said, one adjusts, learns to filter, much like the way we all shut out ambient noise when we’re chatting at a café. There’s just a lot more to attend to. As I said, it’s exhausting. All the raw, edgy newness, that’s what gets to me ... all these sounds I’ve never before registered. I need to somehow archive and map them as sensations but there is a seeming infinity of soundings and with enhanced hearing you become hyper-aware of, how can I say this without ... well, do you know about the theory of the multiverse?

**SD:** Uhm, I think so. It’s speculative physics, like string theory’s eleven dimensions right? Or what is it, quantum field theory and super symmetry? Something like that ... and the multiverse idea posits that we’re having this conversation in a billion other world bubbles, each with different rules of physics and maybe in one you’re a man or a rat and I’m wearing blue instead of red and so on.

**BB:** Yes! [excited] That’s basically it without the math. I don’t understand the math either. [laughing] Anyway, I have this feeling, and I know it sounds totally crazy, but sometimes I think I am listening in on parallel worlds. It’s hard to explain, but imagine simultaneous repetition. This layered or superpositioned finely nuanced difference. It’s a thickening feeling yet somehow elastic. Thickening, not sickening, though now that I say it this way I realize I am often viscerally affected. I puke a lot these days but it feels like a cleansing mechanism. Anyway, I’m partial to the multiverse theory because I think I hear it. Sometimes I think I smell it. Anyway, wrapping myself in thick, or maybe folded is a better term, folded multiplici-
ties of reality somehow grounds me. Undergrounds me. Like feeling tremors in the safety of a deep hole. [pause; clears throat] But you probably want to know about the singing right? Actually, it’s also very difficult to describe.

**SD:** [loud exhale] Phew. This is quite a lot to consider but yes, I was coming to the singing of course.

**BB:** OK. I don't understand yet what, why or how I'm privy to what I now hear, the multiverse theory aside. The geneticists working with me think I am biologically attuned, via some accelerated DNA quirk, to the frequencies of the Rodentia species and that’s why I pick up on specific tonal patterns. [chair squeaking] So yeah, the best way to explain the sensation of the singing is that it sounds like birdsong but it’s weirdly more guttural even though the intonation is stratospherically high. The experience of the song, well I’ve only ever heard BØB, as far as I know, but it exceeds any possibility of describing it with uhm, language. I'm hearing some kind of plaintive cosmic tune and at the same time my guts are rattling. Rattling! Ha! That's a good word.

**SD:** Rattling? You mean you feel a trans-species sensation of coming undone?

**BB:** Whoa. Good one Shaz! But ... not really undone ... more like a corporeal modulation with emotional qualities. And, once, I swear I heard this, there were two voices. Not in a call and response ritual like mating birds, but in a duet. Like the technique Buddhist monks practice. It was extraordinary. Two parallel lines, one higher and more expressive, more vibrato so to speak, the other like a droning, supportive harmony with less pitch variation. Anyway, it’s not comparable to our familiar calibration of sympathetic vibrations but it’s not not like that either. It’s a very specific example simultaneous repetitions or
parallel worlds I was talking about before. But different. As I said, words fail me again ... rattling ... I like that ... rattled. I’m rattled. God, I wish I didn’t like puns so much. [laughing]

**SD:** Maybe this is a good moment to move on to a discussion of what most of my readers and listeners are keen to learn more about, what can we call it ... your morphological transformation.

**BB:** Uh huh, yes. What would you like to know?

**SD:** Ah, well, as much as you’re willing to tell. I don’t want to trap you into a corner with inappropriate questions. Hmmm, maybe that’s an awkward way of putting it. [water pouring; water spilling to floor] I see you’re still wearing the kinky red latex gloves. [both laugh] Perhaps you could tell us about your daily routines and about, how did you call it last time – Tattarrattat – the Joycean wake-up call that sits on your left cheek? About the changes to your skin surfaces, the shape of your nose ...

**BB:** I can address these things.

**SD:** Great. We are aware your condition is altogether inexplicable by any contemporary biological or medical categorization. You are amazing and mystifying scientists and philosophers from every conceivable specialization. That said, a handful of artists are on the beat, as it were, with the remarkable event your evolving condition presents. I’ve seen some interesting work popping up lately in performance galleries and downtown graffiti. Have you seen the rat silhouette’s that line the sidewalks near the bakeries and vegan franchises? Brilliant. But, the provocation is clear and I want to leave the storytelling to you.
BB: Could we take a small break first? I need to freshen my hands as I have this uhm, medicinal routine. It will help me to, uhm, collect my thoughts.

SD: Surely.

[seven-minute break]

SD: [tapping mic] We’re back with Bette B and the ongoing saga of her extraordinary transformation.

BB: Yes. The changes. My *jiwa* jiwa. There are new names for things in my world, neologisms just kinda pop to mind. I feel them as phonetic utterances as I can’t find ready descriptors for the flux state of my becoming-whatever. These sounds appear randomly purposeful so I use them. Am I too esoteric here about these sensually and nonsensually perceived occurrences?

SD: No, no, well … nonsensually … ? No just go on …

BB: OK, so microperceptions seem to percolate and perish in what feels like an expanding middle, my *potsun hara hara* I call it. I have real problems with recognition yet I’m somehow navigating with an explorer’s excitement and lack of trepidation. I was never particularly courageous before, even afraid of my own shadow after midnight, so this is all pretty strange.

SD: And how are you adjusting to your celebrity status?

BB: Ha! I call it *shiiin* – the sound of silent staring. It has a fluctuating frequency within the human range, in fact it’s very low, subwoofer low, around 40 Hz. It’s everywhere I go. I’ve gotten used to it and, to be honest, it’s a calming antidote to the ultrasonic vibrations. Almost everything
has a sound now – love, stars, wrinkles, blushing, anger, sadness, smoothness – it’s a language I’m learning.

**SD:** Can you give us an example of what you hear now?


**SD:** My ...

**BB:** Sorry, I can get a bit carried away.

**SD:** What is it exactly you’re singing? Is it singing ... ? Or ... You appear to be transported.

**BB:** Really, I have no idea but I’ve heard these sounds before, they come from B⊕B, I’m sure of that, and I repeat them. I’m really not very original.

**SD:** Fascinating. [water pouring] Could you maybe say something about the changes to your nose, your enhanced scenting abilities?

**BB:** OK. The enhancements to my sense of smell have come more slowly, they’re evolving at a different speed. Scent-sing. Right now it’s more uncomfortable and disturbing than my overzealous hearing. There is so much *tsun tsun* I never noticed before. I can hardly breathe sometimes. I have a strange love/hate relationship with decay now. Rot is the worst smell and the most seductive smell. It’s weird mix, a Vanitas *memento mori* of the sumptuous and the dying in one whiff. Everything has a scentuous decay factor. Food, furniture, feces, fungus, feet, functions, fog, fictives, fortitude, fucking. [pause] What a string of “F” words. Funny that. Anyway, I respect the decaying process and find entropy naturally beautiful but the smell of
it is less than fine. It’s just like the sound of smiling I was talking about. Just like sound, all things and non-things seem to have a scent. So, here I go again with ... [pause] I kinda like the ad nauseam flow of lists ... anyway ... stars, friendship, mountains, thought, shining, blushing, anger, shock, happiness. Like that. They sound. And for me, sound and smell entangle in a cacophony of sensory data that, well you’d think it would overload my central nervous system but somehow, perceptually, I cope. My survival mechanisms are strong and getting stronger. [glass rattles, sipping water]

SD: This is all very difficult for us to imagine. It’s so ... so extraordinary, what’s happening to you.

BB: I have techniques. Yoga’s good. Meditation is tricky coz the sensations amplify. It’s like sitting on a cushioned knife edge between nothing and too much. I read philosophy, French mostly. You know, contemporary process-oriented stuff.

SD: Hmmm. I never thought it could actually be useful. So, aah, do you have any other means of relaxation?

BB: My taste for wine is slowly decreasing but there’s, uhm, the Purello. I’ve developed a ritual technique, a way of licking the stuff bero bero from my hands and forearms. Have you ever taken hallucinogens?

SD: No.

BB: Well, to be honest I only experimented in college and that was ages ago, but it’s that kind of high. Very much like a dream state. Ironically, the stuff that supposedly keeps me in a non-contaminate state is the same stuff that helps me feel my potential. Or, I can say this better ... unfolds the abstract as the real it is.
SD: Hmmm, and how do feel about the more visible changes, the ones that produce, as I understand it, the ubiquitous, encompassing sound of shiiin, the sound of staring? Tattarrattat, the shifting registers in your voice, the subtle widening of your nostrils, the thickening hair on your limbs, though I don’t see that now ... ? These physically visible attributes must be disconcerting?

BB: I have been frequenting my local wax bar. The attendants are adjusting to what we now call the “Hirsute Global” as opposed to the Brazilian. [loud laughing] Hurts like hell but I sometimes need to reconnect to human prescriptions for normalcy. My voice isn’t a major problem as of yet though I sense it altering, somehow diminishing even though I’m convinced I can speak outside the frame of human hearing. It’s a strange paradoxical feeling.

SD: And RatTat?

BB: Yes, the giraglowing gift from BΘB’s own hands that is the source of all my dismay. Situated on my cheek as it is, it exhibits my moods in a wildly extrovert fashion. You can’t believe how many people approach me about it.

SD: There’s a recent cheeky gif from an artist called GlowTat that has gone, ahhh ... viral. [loud laughing]

BB: Yeah I saw it! The hysterical strobo blinking one with the soylent green frogs and the hoops right?

SD: Yeah. [still laughing] And those vibrating prismatic guerilla gorilla masks. Wild!

BB: Well, as I used to say, “Immanence trumps Transcendence.” [sound of water glass placed on table] Do you get that?
Interview with ShazDada, Part Two

**SD:** No, not really.

**BB:** That’s OK, I don’t say it any more. Like that.

[end of excerpt]