

Hugs and Kisses

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Interviewed and translated into German by Ines Voigts, Gesine Claus, Nina Schulz

1) Tell us a little bit about your Chubster gang project. What kind of gang are you? Do you scare and frighten people?

Charlotte: The Chubsters are a vicious fat queer girl gang, but you don't have to be fat, queer, a girl or even particularly vicious to join, it's all about the attitude. I am the boss of the gang. Some of us are scary, some of us are meek, some of us are really fierce some of the time. I guess we are fairly united in our disdain for fatphobia and our love of freakhood, which is a powerful thing for fat people, and people of all sizes, to embrace. We vary! We've been around for about five years, have about 100 jumped-in, card-carrying and badge-wearing members, and many fans.
www.chubstergang.com

More recently the Chubsters has become a kind of wrapper for various projects, for example the film show at the British Film Institute, music, events, even stonemasonry! In early October we will be co-organising The Fat of the Land: A Queer Chub Harvest Festival in London, which will be a twisted, punk, Wicker Man-style take on traditional harvest festivals, including performances and jam-tasting.
www.queerchub.blogspot.com

2) Your trademark is the Screaming C and the Donut Hands greeting, which I diligently practise since London. What are they about?

Good work! Both of these were invented at a Chubsters gang meeting in New Jersey in 2004. Every gang needs a menacing symbol that it can graffiti or tattoo on random surfaces, and every gang needs a tough hand sign. The C stands for Chubster and has blood-dripping teeth and a crazy eye, the Donut is an important symbol because donuts are tasty. Both need to be executed with a sneer. Funnily enough, I met the supermodel Kate Moss a few weeks ago and I taught her how to do donut hands. She was into it.

3) Why did you set up the Chubster Gang?

I saw Katrina Del Mar's amazing film Gang Girls 2000 and was inspired to start a gang of my own, only with more fat people. I think I just wanted to have a bunch of hot, mean, tough, funny, gorgeous and criminally-minded fat pals who would back me up in any situation. I had early fantasies of doing activist things, but I was quite limited in what I thought we could do and what we've ended up doing has been a lot more fun. Fat people often have to contend with street harassment and mean stares, I really like the idea of returning that stare aggressively, of showing that we are tough and can fight back. I also like the idea of subverting the stereotype of the jolly fat person; the Chubsters is sort of a joke, but it uses humour that can be unsettling and uncomfortable for people who are fatphobic.

The other thing is that my friend Kira Jolliffe published a magazine called Cheap Date and said that she would print a photostory if I started a gang. How could I refuse? I convinced some friends to join in, we made up stupid names and biographies for

ourselves, I made a website, later my girlfriend and I did a couple of workshops and started jumping people in, and that's how it started.

4) Is it important to you, to also view your project as part of a queer politics and culture?

Yes, very important. Queer culture, politics, history and theory have given me a way of understanding myself and my various communities that is totally relevant to fat stuff. These include ideas about transgression, of creating your own cultural artefacts, of re-appropriating oppressive language, of intentional community, of sex, of subversive and fun activism, of expansive possibilities, of punk and DIY. I honour radical queer and trans trailblazers, some of whom are also part of the fat rights movement, they saved my life as a young fat queer and they continue to inspire me now that I am getting older. But I am no separatist, the Chubsters is open to everyone, regardless of how queer or not you are.

5) Which fat activists have impressed you the most?

The Fat Underground, a group of women, including some dykes, who were active in the US for about ten years from the mid-70s onwards, are some of my favourite activists; they were the first to establish a politics of fat. I also love Lew Louderback, who published an incendiary book called *Fat Power* in 1970, it's dated but still extremely relevant, and I got to meet him in New York recently. The dykes who produced *FaT GiRL* zine in San Francisco in the mid-90s are friends and heroes to me, they were so wild and lawless, creative and organised.

I love the work that a bunch of people are doing today, including Corinna Tomrley, who just co-published a book called *fat Studies* in the UK; Sondra Solovay, who does amazing legal work in the US and who is instrumental in the development of anti-discrimination legislation there; Substantia Jones, who has a brilliant photography series called *The Adipositivity Project*; Kelli Dunham, who is this great butch who's doing work around medical self-advocacy, to name but a few.

6) Which other groups or activists are you in contact with? Who would you like to cooperate with in the future?

NOLOSE (www.nolose.org), the US-based organisation for fat dykes and queers has really championed the Chubsters and given us platforms to do workshops and promote ourselves.

There is a supportive queer/trans community in London who seem to be interested in developing cross-overs and intersections between fat and trans identity and embodiment. Bring it on, I say! There's also a developing *Health At Every Size* community in the UK that, unlike some anti-diet initiatives of the past, is interested in developing links with fat activism, including the Chubsters.

My dream collaborations involve doing Chubster stuff with older rad fatties, maybe those who were active in the early fat lib movement, also some kind of dance project would be amazing, or something that is really cross-cultural, that breaks fat stuff out of its white and Western straightjacket. Get in touch with me if you have any suggestions: beefergrrl@hotmail.com

7) You also deal with the representation of Chubbers in film. Do you have a favourite character?

I think Percy Adlon's 1980s collaborations with Marianne Sägebrect are really hard to beat in terms of complex depictions of fat identity. These films seem sort of forgotten now, at least in the UK, which is a terrible shame, I'd love to see Zuckerbaby again. John Waters' work with Divine and Edie Massey also deserves a mention, all of them are wonderful freaks! Darlene Cates as the mother in What's Eating Gilbert Grape? is quite a tragic figure, but it still blows me away to see a superfat actor onscreen, it's a rare sight.

8) Some of your gang are coming to Hamburg in October to organise a workshop and gang meeting during the queer film festival. What are you looking forward to the most, when you come to Hamburg?

Meeting amazing, fun, brilliant fat and queer people and seeing some lovely films; the sensory assault of the Reeperbahn; delicious German Brot und Kuchen, and the possibility of eating vegetarian schnitzel and knödel; bobbing around in beautiful swimming pools (suggestions welcome!); stocking up on Tetesept bath products, the best in the world as far as I am concerned; fluffy duvets, maybe riding a bicycle, being with my loved ones. I can't wait. My 41st birthday is on 26 October too!