

CHARLOTTE COOPER

Clare (C) interviewing Charlotte (CH)

Extract 1: 15.09 – 16.06

DEFINITION OF QUEER AS A NOUN AND A VERB

CH: ... so queer I think of in ... I think of as a kind of er, an umbrella sexuality for ... for anything really I guess, but generally to do with, well ... how to describe it? Generally to do with, well OK, non-normative sexuality, non hetro-normative sexuality. That's what I think of it being about. But I also think about it as being a sensibility, and there's a great piece that I quote in my book actually, from um, Noreen Giffney who talks about it as being this kind of unknowingness, this kind of weirdness, this indefinability, this um, preposterousness about its oddness and unsettlingness about it too. So I ... so I think about queer in two ways, as a way of describing sexuality and also things being queer, or to queer something or what have you, with these particular sensibilities.

Extract 2: 29.57 – 32.35

SM DYKES. PUNK DYKES. DELLA GRACE. SM BI. FAT AND PROUD BOOK.

CH: ... the SM dykes were much sharper because of course they'd had this tradition, I don't know if you know about this kind of rebel dykes thing that ... oh anyway there's a ... there's a

C: Tell me.

CH: Yeah ... how to describe it. I was kind of on the edge, very much on the edge of that. But there were um ... there was a group of dykes in London, in fact there was, there was a house in Paistow in Crescent Road, a shared house, and this was kind of like pre Riot Girl, kind of punk dykes, a community really, and many of them would go to SM Dykes, and I guess they're represented in, well Della at the time, Della Grace's Love Bites, and there was a club called Chain Reaction as well which I never went to, which I think was held at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in Cowcross Street.

And yeah, so they were around. They were just basically a group of really rowdy dykes, who didn't ... who were exciting to me because they were again so different to these, I don't know, what seemed to me very tame um, lesbian feminist separatists that I'd experienced in Wales who were very much of the kind of circle dancing, astrology, you know? Knit your own hummus type ... type scenario! Not to dis any of that, I do love hummus, but erm ... and I don't mind knitting as well, but you know, there was just a very, very, different kind of scene. It was just

really exciting to encounter these ... all these punk rowdy people who I guess for me were a kind of Spastic Society connection to an ... to an earlier sort of version of myself in many ways too. Badly behaved. Really badly behaved people, and yeah and SM Bi, and also they didn't give a shit who anyone fucked either, as long as you were available, that was the most important thing so, you know, I made some friends in that group too.

And I guess just before this time, because of Fat Girl, I ... I'd written a book called Fat and Proud and I spent the advance of that on a plane ticket to San Francisco and had my first experience of lesbian sex there with um, well, was it lesbian sex? Anyway, Queer sex, dyke sex with um, with a big fat butch there, who I met there, who I'm still friends with as well. So things were changing for me and I guess the big thing that had changed was um, I ... me and Simon had discovered through talking to other people "Oh, we can still be together but it's all right if you want to see other people."

Extract 3: 37.58 – 40.10

DISAPPEARING QUEER SPACES AROUND STRATFORD

But ... I want to say some other stuff about the other pubs around here. There was also a place called The Angel which was um, I can't remember the street it's on, but it's next to a church. Yeah, all these places are gone now. So The Coronet ... Dorothys at The Woodman closed almost immediately. There's ... I don't know why it couldn't keep going, and then The Coronet went on for years and was a very popular pub but then, um, somebody made the owner ... and Dom disappeared somewhere. I don't know what happened to him and some other guy Bob bought it and then somebody made Bob an offer that he couldn't refuse on the building, and so he sold up probably for what was an enormous amount at the time but quite small now. I think they offered him like a million for it or something. And then um, it turned into an estate agents, which every time I walk past there I just feel so ... so gutted. So completely disgusted by that.

And then there was another pub round the corner called The Angel, and that had drag acts for a while and then, yeah, it just ... it just disappeared. I think there were some homophobic attacks outside of it. And there were other queer spaces in Stratford as well. There was a pub up the way called The Pigeons, which was a pub for a while and now is a Tesco Metro type thing and upstairs they used to have gay dances there, and there was also a place round the corner of The Rex on the high street, which was called Reflections. It's been derelict forever, but for a while we called it Rejections, and in the basement there used to, you know, there used to be dykes and you know, homosexuals there.

So there were lots of queer spaces in Stratford that have disappeared now and believe me the Olympics has not helped at all. The Olympics has been all about faith groups, faith groups, faith groups, community, community, community but nothing about the homos at all, so, you know, it's pretty desolate really here for queer life, when actually there had been quite a ... quite a

community of people. I mean, you know, the Rebel Dykes in Plaistow, not far away, just the other side of West Ham Park, and these three gay pubs. I mean, there was a time when you could do like a gay pub crawl in Stratford, which is ... just doesn't happen anymore.