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An Exploration of Clowning and Gender

By

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by Research

Supervised by Dr. Dave Calvert

Abstract

This thesis analyses the development of the relationship between gender and clowning from a historical context to a contemporary one. The purpose of this is to gain insight into the traditional clown figure which has become synonymous with masculinity, despite it being described as androgynous or neutral. The result of this has been that explicitly female clowns have come to be considered characters, and not valid clown performers. The analysis will be conducted using established principles of clowning alongside a gendered categorisation of otherness.

The analysis begins with a discussion surrounding two historic female clowns, Evetta Matthews and Lulu Adams, who performed in circuses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This chapter explores the idea that these women were used to play a clown character and not considered as real members of the clowning industry as a whole. As the thesis moves further into the twentieth century it discusses the work of French circus clown Annie Fratellini, who functions as a transitional figure between the historical and the contemporary. It argues that while her practice is heavily linked to traditional circus clowning, it becomes progressive in her sense of status within the role of clown and her work to provide opportunities in clowning to those born outside of the circus. Finally, the thesis analyses two contemporary clowns: Maggie Irving, a feminist clown; and Angela de Castro, a gender fluid clown. It is also at this stage where the thesis moves away from the circus and into theatre clowning. The aim of this final chapter is to demonstrate how practices have developed from the historical and transitional female clowns, through to the use of a feminist clown practice and an identity-based practice.

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Contents

List of Figures

Introduction: An Exploration of Clowning and Gender

In her book *Feminism is For Everybody* (2000), hooks points out that 'in all spheres of literary writing and academic scholarship women had historically received little or no attention' (hooks, 2000, p.20). It would seem that this also applies to the sphere of clowning. When reading current and historical literature available on clown performance, one might come to believe that women have only existed in clowning for a short time. One may also be led to believe that there are still only a few women in the clowning industry today. However, for women in clowning the issue is not that they have only recently begun to clown, nor is it small numbers. It is that they, alongside any performer who operates outside of the gender binary, have been largely excluded from the documentation of this male dominated art form. This is evidenced by authors such as Towsen (2018) and Irving (2013), whose readings are discussed in this thesis.

In clown literature one may only find a small section based around gender and clowning, or women who clown (see Davison, 2013). Some of these may even acknowledge the exclusion of women but do little to contribute towards changing the issue (see Peacock, 2009). As such, women like myself struggle to find figures that we might relate to within clowning and are given the impression that to clown successfully one should strive to be more like the readily accessible male role models. These figures do exist though and, as this thesis explores, there are women and non-binary people who are clowning in ways that begin to move away from patriarchal practices.

These practices demonstrate another challenge faced by women and non-binary people in clowning, for example the idea that a clown must not appear gendered or should have a 'neuter quality' (Hugill cited in Irving, 2013, p.94). Ideas such as this seem only to apply to women. In literature it is the 'explicitly female clowns' (Kerman, 1992, p.9) whose validation as clowns is brought into question. Clown literature does not mention the explicitly male clown, instead he is just described as a clown. This perpetuates the idea that the clown body should appear as a male one, and that women who wish to fill this role should hide their femininity to avoid further exclusion. By making the clown body and male body synonymous with one another, clown literature also excludes non-binary and gender fluid performers. Although these performers may at times appear as being masculine, this is not necessarily how they will appear consistently, either during a single performance or over multiple performances. As such they are also at risk of having their validity brought into question.

This thesis is predominantly an analysis of the relationship between clowning and gender, and how this relationship has developed over time. Within this it will also take a focused look at women and non-binary individuals in clowning. The analysis is conducted using principles of clowning which will be identified using a literature review so that the work discussed can be accurately considered as examples of clown performance.

The thesis also looks at different approaches to gender, such as a fluid approach, to show how the use of gender can aid performers in aligning with clowning principles. For example, as the literature review points out, clowning is based on otherness and

the act of being unsocialised. Gender, as the literature review also explains, makes up part of a person's socialisation. In presenting gender in a way that deviates from social norms a performer has more opportunities to behave in an unsocialised manner, subsequently signalling their otherness. The literature review also establishes a link between otherness and gender in society which can be applied to the use of gender in clowning.

The literature review begins with an explanation of basic clowning principles using the research of several different authors. The second contextualises gender and explores in more detail the restrictiveness of some practices employed by clown teachers. It also looks further into the concept of otherness in relation to gender and clowning, later going on to explain gender fluidity as an alternative approach that is being used by some practitioners.

Moving on, the thesis will look back at the history of female clowning, identifying figures who, thus far, have only been briefly discussed in clown documentation and literature. Not only will this clarify the existence of female clowns prior to the late twentieth century, but also look in more detail at their careers and experiences as female clowns. Within this the use of clowning principles in relation to gendered behaviour and otherness will be analysed.

Before moving into a contemporary context, the thesis will look at the period in between the work of these historical and contemporary female clowns. This will

focus on one influential figure in particular, Annie Fratellini, who bridges the gap between these periods.

Finally, as the thesis moves into a contemporary context it discusses how the relationship between clowning and gender has changed and continues to develop. Alongside Maggie Irving this section also features the only clown discussed in this thesis who does not identify as a woman, Angela de Castro. They are a non-binary clown whose practice presents new ways of thinking about clowning and gender.

In summary this thesis will discuss how women have clowned in the past, and how women and non-binary people currently do clown. It will analyse the relevance and use of gender in their performances and how this has influenced their careers. By assessing their work using clowning principles it is possible to validate both their clowning and the use of gender and femininity in clown performance. Discussion will also focus on how the relationship between clowning and gender has developed to challenge the hidden masculinity of the traditional clown. This includes a prominent focus on women clowns but also looks at clown praxis outside of the traditional gender binary.

Literature Review

This thesis proposes to explore gender and clowning in order to find out how gender, and particularly femininity, is performed within this industry. Before looking further into this relationship, it is important to contextualise the research using currently existing literature in both fields. The first section of this review will concern clown performance and how this will be defined throughout the thesis. It will then move on to reviewing key literature on clowning and/or gender, defining terms of gender in relation to clowning principles, such as otherness, and assessing their usefulness.

Defining Clown Performance

One of clown's most prominent features is the term's ambiguity. There is no one exhaustive definition of what a clown is or what a clown should do in order to be considered a clown. Louise Peacock, author of *Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance* (2009), describes the process of defining clown as 'vexatious' (Peacock, 2009, p.14). She also points out that 'commentators on clown (Swortzell), clown teachers (Lecoq), directors (John Wright) and clown performers (Oleg Popov) have repeatedly made the attempt' (Peacock, 2009, p.14).

Clown performer, teacher, and author Jon Davison (2013, p.3) explains that a range of views could be considered partly true, 'at least in a particular moment in a particular place'. This is because clowns change depending on the context in which they exist. McManus (2003, p.11) cites playwright and performer Dario Fo, 'clowns

can be found at all times and in all countries'. They have a long history and have appeared in a variety of cultural contexts. Davison (2013, p.2) writes that the reasons different clowns have different, and often very particular characteristics, can usually be traced to specific dates, people, or places.

However, it is important to note that despite not having a simple definition there are still ways that one might identify a clown more broadly. Davison (2013, p.3) does this by looking back through the history of clowning to find out if there is 'anything which always holds true for clowns'. In doing this Davison (2013) is able to identify qualities which signify, broadly speaking, the principles of clowning such as otherness, failure and audience relationships. McManus (2003, p.11) explains that this is a common method of researching clowning and that 'most scholars and historians in the field have […] confined themselves' to the 'describing of character traits, or points of similarity from tradition to tradition'.

Peacock also acknowledges the changeability of clowning depending on the context in which it exists. She categorises (non-exhaustively) types of clowning based on performance structure and content: circus clowning, clown shows, clown theatre, and clown actors (Peacock, 2009).

In the circus, Peacock (2009, p.31) explains that clowns are used to fill the time between the other acts. This type of clowning may contain a simple narrative, 'such as preparing for a music recital', or it may 'parody the previous act' (Peacock, 2009, p.31). Simplicity is important here as 'rarely, if ever, is there a narrative which runs through the totality of clown routines' in circus performance (Peacock, 2009, p.31).

Peacock identifies clown shows as being the closest relative to classic circus clowning. She does however point out that even though acts from a clown show could 'readily form part of a circus', they take on a 'different resonance' (Peacock, 2009, p.34), making the two distinct from one another. This is because clown shows are performed in a theatre space, are sustained for a longer amount of time and they are uninterrupted by other acts.

Peacock then goes on to talk about clown theatre. In this theatre all the performers on stage are clowns and the show will have a surreal visual aesthetic, possibly with elements of fantasy. These are devised shows which may contain some spoken word, however there is 'likely to be close interaction between the performers and music or sound effects' (Peacock, 2009, p.34). In clown theatre there is usually an established 'interactive relationship' (Peacock, 2009, p.34) between audience and performer which may be formed via the performers leaving the stage or bringing the action into the audience. What distinguishes this type of clowning from clown shows or classic circus clowning is the presence of a narrative which tends to explore 'plot or character motivation' (Peacock, 2009, p.34). In this way clown theatre performances 'are closer to the linear impetus of conventional theatre' than clown shows and circus clowning (Peacock, 2009, p.34).

Peacock also makes a point of writing about clown actors. A clown actor will play a clown character that has been written as a part of a show that also has non-clown characters being played by non-clown actors. The 'interaction of the clown actor with non-clown actors' and the 'dominance of text' (Peacock, 2009, p.34) in these performances are what make them significantly different to clown theatre

performances. Peacock does however make the important point that there are performers who move between these categories. She uses the example of Angela de Castro who, when performing in their scripted show *Only Fools (No Horses),* would be considered a clown actor but, when playing Rough in *Slava's Snow Show*, would be better defined as a clown theatre performer. *Only Fools (No Horses)* is a show about Shakespeare's fools, the characters already existed in script, de Castro simply filled these roles and elaborated on their stories. The clown Rough in *Slava's Snow Show* was created through de Castro exploring their inner clown. Although Rough is part of a wider, story-based narrative, his performance utilises physical movement as opposed to the spoken word[1]. In doing this Peacock (2009, p.35) highlights the flexibility of these terms and demonstrates 'the need to evaluate each performance according to its performance style'.

This thesis will focus on circus clowning, clown shows and clown theatre. It will not look at clown actors in detail however some clowns discussed, such as de Castro, have engaged with clown acting within their careers.

Keeping in mind these categories and considering the variety of opinions surrounding what defines a clown I have chosen not to use or create a singular definition. Peacock's categorisation of different types of clown performance are evidence that clowning is not fixed. Therefore, to use one inflexible definition would be to limit the opportunities for analysis within the research.

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[1] For clarity in the use of gender pronouns, "they" refers to de Castro as they are a person of fluid gender identity, and "he" refers to de Castro's clown Rough who is identified as a male persona.

Alternatively, this thesis relies on three clown authors, Peacock, Davison, and McManus, to identify key principles that can be used to identify a performance as clowning. The principles that will be discussed are otherness, failure, and audience connection, and how these principles relate to laughter as a response to clowning. These principles have been chosen as all three authors have identified them as foundational and they each allow a certain amount of flexibility in their use, which in turn allows for a more flexible definition of clowning. All of these principles then can be applied to the performances discussed within the thesis but are not limited in how they are presented. For example, otherness is described as a principle for identifying clowning. This otherness may be signified by the clown's aesthetic; however, this does not mean that all clowns must follow one aesthetic rule.

'Other' is a term discussed often in clowning. According to Peacock (2009, p.15) there 'is always something of the "other" about clowns'. This is a feature that has been present in clown throughout history. Davison (2013, p.1) cites the *French Academy's* etymological definition of clown in 16th-century England as 'referring to those who do not behave like gentlemen, but in clownish or uncivil fashions'. A clown contradicts the context in which they are present. Their behaviour is considered uncivilised as it does not fit with that society's norms. They have a quality which marks them as different from the rest of society.

As Peacock (2009, p.15) explains this otherness may be expressed 'in the way that they look different from ordinary everyday people (through makeup, costume, the use of the red nose)'. This is how the performer is recognisable as being a clown.

Their distinct costume and makeup 'act as cues to the nature of the performance that is likely to follow' (Peacock, 2009, p.16).

McManus (2003, p.15) writes that the grotesque makeup and masks associated with clowns act as an external sign of the performer's inherent "difference". Master theatre trainer Jacques Lecoq taught his students to use their costumes to enhance features of their body that most people would use clothes to hide. The clown 'shows his weak points - thin legs, big chest, short arms' (Lecoq cited in Irving, 2013, p.55). This is a sign of the clown's social misunderstanding. In Lucy Amsden's analysis of French clown teacher, and Lecoq-student Philippe Gaulier's training methods, costume is discussed as being representative of the clown's 'failure to understand social reality' (Amsden, 2015, p. 173). The purpose of this according to Gaulier (cited in Amsden, 2015, p. 173) is to make the audience laugh and say, 'look at the idiot […] How stupid!'

This use of aesthetic devices to signify the clown's otherness also applies to modes of clowning outside of the theatre or circus, for example in political clowning. Davison cites a conversation he had with Hilary Ramsden, co-founder of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army.

> In costume or makeup, the audience know you are a clown, you are different from the[m] and they accept that you will behave differently. Working without costume, you are like them, and they won't feel you are allowed to deviate. You can't be their peer and clown at the same time (Davison, 2013, p.310)

This shows a certain level of consistency in the views surrounding clown aesthetics. However, it should also be noted that the level to which a clown's costume

transgresses societal norms is dependent on 'the clown's performance style and the frame in which the performance occurs' (Peacock, 2009, p.17). Despite the many variations of clown aesthetics and contexts 'their disruptive quality is constant from genre to genre' (McManus, 2003, p.13).

In the context of my research there must be some signal of otherness in the clown's appearance. This may be overt, such as with circus clowns in brightly coloured costumes and grotesque makeup, or it may be as subtle as using just the simple red nose. I have chosen to make this a broad measure of specification so that I do not exclude performers based on just costume. While this is important to the clown's otherness, it is only a small part.

McManus and Peacock both acknowledge costume as key to signalling the clown's otherness but further explain that the clown's difference more importantly extends to their behaviour. 'The audience recognises that the clown not only looks different but has a different approach to the world' (McManus, 2003, p.15). Peacock (2009, p.15) points out that it is their 'attitude to life as expressed through their performance' that is the most striking feature of the clown's otherness.

McManus notes that clowns have a contradictory approach to life. They find 'an alternative "way of doing" using a distinct "clown logic"' (McManus, 2003, p.15). Davison (2013, p.3) also recognises this, writing that, in a way, to 'go against the grain' is what clowns do. This is a quality reflected in Lecoq's teaching, he attempts to uncover a person's 'hidden side' (a part of finding one's "inner clown") which reveals 'unexpected personal behaviour' (Lecoq cited in Irving, 2013, p.88).

McManus explains that in a basic clowning scenario the clown will be presented with a problem that appears simple from the audience's perspective. This problem is resolved when the clown finds a solution which takes the audience by surprise. The surprise comes from the solution being not what 'they envisioned or had not been presented as consistent with the theatrical convention being used' (McManus, 2003, pp.12-13). The clown is not bound by the rules because they are either too stupid to notice them or choose to disregard them in favour of their own solutions which are born from their own "clown logic".

This essential otherness is also signalled by the clown's attitude to failure. Davison (2013, p.3) highlights the essentiality of failure to clowning, describing it as the foundation for 'most clown training of the last half century'. Although failure can be considered a facet of otherness in that it functions to highlight the clown's difference from society, its description as foundational to clowning means that it can also be considered a principle in its own right.

Failure in this context is not simply the act of doing something wrong but is used as a performance technique. In *Clown Training; A Practical Guide* (2015), Davison writes about training clowns in a way that will replace habituated and rule-bound behaviours with 'an acceptance of the pleasures of failure and unknowingness' (Davison, 2015, p.23). McManus also acknowledges failure as a part of clown performance, writing that 'the clown will always try to think through a given situation and either fail because of an [sic] hopeless inability to understand the rules or

succeed because of a limitless ability to create new rules' (McManus, 2003, p.15). Even when the clown succeeds it is through their failure to adhere to the norm.

This is exhibited in a sketch by American clown Emmett Kelly (McManus, 2003, p.12). In it he notices the spotlight, he mistakes it for dirt and attempts to sweep it with the intention of making it disappear. He does not realise this is a spotlight, or that in sweeping one is simply moving mess out of the way, or that the spotlight is in the control of a technician. This results in failure, the technician would reduce, expand, and move the spotlight, teasing Kelly and furthering his belief that this was dirt and not just a light. Eventually Kelly accepts that he has failed in his intention to remove what he sees as dirt and instead uses the sweeping brush to move the light underneath a curtain, so it is out of sight (with help from the technician, unbeknownst to Kelly).

In the end Kelly has managed to use his tool for the purpose which it is intended (sweeping away) by failing to succeed in his own task (removal of the "dirt"). Kelly ultimately uses his sweeping brush to move the "dirt", which the audience knows is the regular function of this object. He is exposed as failing to understand this regular function as he considers his inability to completely remove the "dirt" with his sweeping brush a failure.

What is important to note here is that Kelly does not fight against his failure, he accepts it and finds an alternative solution (even if only he believes he has discovered this solution). It is the acceptance of failure that is key to clown performance because it makes the clown vulnerable, and this is what the audience

finds entertaining. Davison (2013, p.211) cites Gaulier's accounts of teaching clowning to explain this.

A student performs an exercise, but the class does not find him funny which makes the student frustrated. Gaulier asks the class who liked the student, and nobody answers. He asks the student if he knows why this is and the student simply replies "no" which causes the class to start laughing. Gaulier then asks the class if they like the student when he does not understand, and the class tell Gaulier that they love him. Gaulier explains to the student '"They're laughing because when you don't understand your face is full of comic foolishness […] People laugh at his vulnerability and his foolishness"' (Gaulier cited in Davison, 2013, p.211). My earlier description of Lecoq's views on costume also fits with this view as it exposes the performer's weak points, drawing focus to their vulnerability.

What is clear here is that the clown does not just expose their failure for failure's sake but to show their vulnerability to the audience. The use of failure in clown performance is intertwined with the relationship the clown makes with their audience. Peacock (2009, p.27) explains that the clown's incompetence speaks 'to the inner vulnerability of the audience whose members are often bound by societal conventions which value success over failure'. There is a kind of catharsis that happens here, the clown is vulnerable in a way that in day-to-day life is deemed unacceptable, they accept their failure and invite the laughter that follows. Witnessing failure in simple scenarios and being allowed to laugh provokes a feeling of superiority, and a release from the rules that dictate that we must always succeed.

Davison expands on how the clown's use of failure influences the relationship, or *complicité* (shared experience), they form with their audience. He writes that in clowning the 'point of reference, ultimately, is the audience, who come to be pleased' (Davison, 2013, p.228). Davison claims that when a clown performs an action for an audience there are two possible outcomes: laughter or no laughter. If there is laughter, then the clown has succeeded and can continue, but if not, then the clown has failed. In the case of failure, the clown must then respond with either acceptance or resistance. Davison goes on to say that if the failure is accepted, 'and the audience sees that I have accepted it, they will most probably laugh' (Davison, 2013, p.198). Once again, the clown may continue, knowing that the audience is with them. However, if they choose to resist the failure and simply 'soldier on' as if nothing has happened despite 'the stage death that is looming' (Davison, 2013, p.198), they will bore the audience and remain a failure.

The audience is responding to a 'moment [of] seeing the clown' (Davison, 2013, p.228), it appears as if they are seeing something authentic. Both the performer and the audience are taking pleasure in the clown's 'vulnerability, through failure and its acceptance' (Davison, 2013, p.228). Davison (2013, p.228) also refers to this as 'clown presence'. This is similar to McManus' idea of 'clown logic', which is also dependent on the 'reception of the audience' (McManus, 2003, p.17) as they define the meaning of the clown's performance with their response. McManus (2003, p.15) also points out that by inviting this response the clown acts as a bridge between the mimetic world of play and the world of the audience. This strengthens Davison's argument that the audience is the ultimate point of reference in clown performance

as the performance relies on their response, whether that is the desired response or not.

The nature of the connection created by the clown in this thesis is a combination of perceived superiority: a bridge between the world of play and the world of the audience; and a sense of *complicité* or shared experience. This is because all these relationships can be seen to feed into one another. For example, in provoking a feeling of superiority with their behaviour the clown shows the audience a world outside of their own where to play and fail is acceptable. The clown is the bridge to this world and by sharing it with their audience they also generate a sense of *complicité*.

Davison's example uses laughter as a measure of success, and this is the final element of clowning that I want to analyse in this review. Laughter is an element that has split opinions regarding its necessity to clown performance. Davison (2013, p.1) cites Gaulier, who describes a clown that does not provoke laughter as 'a shameful mime'. The idea of laughter as an essential principle in clowning, however, is not universally shared. Davison (2013, p.1) cites Simon as saying that 'it's okay not to be funny. Clowns do not have to make people laugh'. He also cites Stott to explain that some believe clowns to be sad or to exhibit 'shabby melancholy' (Davison, 2013, p.1). This presents a range of beliefs about laughter as a feature of clowning and brings the centrality of laughter into question.

An important distinction here is that between the traditional association of laughter with clown and the use of laughter in contemporary clown performance. McManus highlights this as he looks at how the clown has become a protagonist in the theatre. He explains that the clown's historic synonymy as a comic character 'makes him instantly distinct from the protagonist in tragedies from earlier periods' (McManus, 2003, p.12). In the twentieth century the clown is more frequently used to express the contemporary tragic impulse. What was 'once a joke has now been presented as an insight, question, or commentary' (McManus, 2003, p.12). He goes on to explain that rather than simply being present for their comic relief, an audience can expect 'philosophizing, angst, or political criticism as much as physical comedy and fractured language' (McManus, 2003, p.12) from clowns in contemporary theatre.

What McManus does here is useful to an extent as it shows how clowns have developed in a contemporary setting. His research is about clowns being characters, or protagonists, in plays and films such as Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* but can also be applied to clown theatre. In the opening of *Slava's Snow Show*, Slava is attempting to commit suicide. Although this is presented as comic in his failure to do so, the act of suicide is considered a tragic impulse in itself. Slava's presentation of this tragic act through clown is an example of a joke being 'presented as an insight, question or commentary' which can provoke 'philosophizing, angst, or political criticism as much as physical comedy' (McManus, 2003, p.12). In this way McManus's writing on clown as a protagonist character is also relevant to the category of clown theatre which is central to my research.

Maggie Irving, whose work is directly analysed in this thesis, has also published her ideas on clowns and laughter. She acknowledges the clown's traditional associations with laughter but also asserts that clowning can 'elicit other emotional responses according to the context, shared knowledge, culture and politics of the performer and his or her audience' (Irving, 2013, p.13). Context is of particular importance here and Irving's view fits moderately well with Peacock's research into an audience's response to clowns. Whilst Peacock also notes that the shows she discusses 'have a wider purpose than simply to make the audience laugh', she also brings up the fact that 'all of the shows *do* make the audience laugh' (Peacock, 2009, p.13; emphasis in original). While it may not be the sole aim of the performance, the otherness of the clown and their use of failure brings humour to performances that also convey a more meaningful message.

Peacock (2009, p.73) illustrates this when talking about the Entrée 'Storm' in *Slava's Snow Show*. During this section Slava hangs a coat on a coat stand and places a hat on top, giving it the appearance of a person. He puts one arm into the coat and the coat comes to life. He is slowly drawn into being stroked by the "coat person" and they embrace, as if to part ways. During the exchange the "coat person" slips a letter into Slava's pocket. A train blows its whistle, signalling that Slava must depart. He is torn between staying and leaving but eventually he goes. Later the letter falls out of his pocket, and after reading its contents Slava tears it into small pieces. Holding his hands above his head he lets the pieces fall like snowflakes. More snow falls from above and a harsh wind is generated by a fan. The audience sees Slava fight the elements: a bright light shines out at the audience before the auditorium goes black.

While there is an element of comedy here as Slava interacts lovingly with a coat stand, which the audience knows is an inanimate object controlled by Slava, there is a larger purpose to the scene. There is 'a discrete narrative which appears to be about the loneliness of a man as he journeys through life' (Peacock, 2009, p.52). As more snow falls and the environment becomes harsh 'the image of the clown alone against the elements is a powerful one. His vulnerability is highlighted by the sound effects of wind, by the bright light and by the power of the wind against which he struggles' (2009, p.52). In the same way that Slava's vulnerability can be used to make an audience laugh, it can also be used to forge a deeper, more meaningful connection, which communicates the broader themes of the show.

What is important to keep in mind when discussing laughter in clowning is that laughter cannot be viewed as a signifier of clowning. This is because laughter can exist where the clown does not. And, as with Peacock's research, a clown may cause an audience to laugh at moments in their performance but at other times elicit other thoughts and emotions; this does not mean that in these moments the performer is not clowning, they are simply clowning for a different purpose. In the context of my research to identify laughter as a defining feature would be to limit the possibilities present in clown performance. For this reason, I will be viewing laughter as a signifier of the connection that a clown has with their audience and not as a sign of clowning itself.

It is necessary to clarify that in creating a connection with an audience the clown does not then lose their distinct otherness. The audience can relate to the clown in the sense that at some time we will all inevitably fail at something, and in the case of

Slava, we all experience the harshness of life. Societal norms dictate that we must always strive for success, with the fear that should we fail we open ourselves up to ridicule. The clown on the other hand, welcomes this ridicule and exposes their failure, thus maintaining their otherness from an audience whilst also forging a deeper connection with them.

In conclusion, what I have done here is create a loose guide by which clown performance can be identified in this thesis. The performers and performances discussed will be identified as clowns through their use of otherness in their aesthetic choices and behaviour, their use of failure, and the connection they create with an audience which may be indicated, but not limited, by their ability to make an audience laugh. The next section of this thesis will go on to discuss gender in relation to clowning in order to understand how this has impacted clown performance, and how this also relates to the concept of gendered otherness.

Clowning in Relation to Gender

In order to analyse the relationship between gender and clowning, gender as a concept must first be examined. Key to this is the distinction between gender and sex. This distinction is noted by authors in several fields, for example Britta N. Torgrimson and Christopher T. Minson of the American Physiological society, biologist and social-cultural analyst Anne Fausto-Sterling and feminist theorists Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir.

In *Sex and Gender: What is the Difference?* (2005), Torgrimson & Minson refer to sex as 'the biology of [a] human' (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005, p.78) by way of their biological makeup, which is identified as male or female. Fausto-Sterling explains in *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (2012) that this is done at birth and is based on the 'perception of external genital anatomy [...] penis and scrotum in males, vagina and clitoris in females' (Fausto-Sterling, 2012, p.5-7). The identification of one's biological sex then initiates a 'social response' which begins the 'gender socialisation of the new-born' (Fausto-Sterling, 2012, p.6). This socialisation is based on one of the two sex categories assigned at birth and makes up the two-sex category gender binary system of being a man or a woman.

Unlike biological sex though, gender is a much more individual term. Fausto-Sterling (2012, p.6) points out that many psychologists view it as a way of designating 'an individual identity or self-presentation'. For some this may align with their assigned sex (cisgender), while others may deviate from this model. An individual's gender identity is 'interpreted by others using the specific gender frameworks of an individual's culture' (Fausto-Sterling, 2012, p.8). For example, in the United States a woman who 'would wear pants, have short hair, and refrain from using make-up' (Fausto-Sterling, 2012, p. 6) would be viewed by others from that culture as being more masculine. That is not to say this person identifies as being male, they have just chosen a more culturally masculinised presentation of their gender. Others however do come to identify with the gender opposite to the sex which they were assigned at birth and choose to signal this with their gender presentation.

This idea that gender is formed by a person's socialisation is echoed in feminist literature such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1972, p.295) where she states that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. According to de Beauvoir (1972, p.295), at the point when puberty begins 'the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers'. At this point the body is not affected by the hormonal differences present once puberty begins and a person is entering into adulthood. Any evidence prior to this point that a person is becoming 'sexually determined', that is engaging in the gendered behaviour ascribed to their born sex, is the result of 'the influence of others upon the child' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.295).

Judith Butler, in her publication *Gender Trouble* (2011, p. xv) uses a theory of gender performativity in order to explain how this influence results in 'what we take to be an internal essence of gender'. According to this theory, gender is produced 'through a *stylised repetition* of acts' (Butler, 2011, p.191; emphasis in original). These acts take the form of 'bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds' (Butler, 2011, p.191) which over time 'produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 2011, p.45). That is, in repeating a set of acts over time, in this case the bodily acts which reflect the gender binary, the actions come to appear as natural and fixed. For example, Fausto-Sterling's (2012, p.6) woman who 'would wear pants and have short hair' is perceived as being masculine because her bodily acts align with those that have been repeated by men which signals her inherent difference.

In her discussion of clowning, writer, practitioner, and teacher Maggie Irving (2013, p.15) explains that in her career she has been 'told by various men that clowns are more androgynous'. She affirms her experience using other clown authors such as Hugill, who Irving (2013, p.94) cites as writing that clowns 'tend to have a neuter quality' and fit into 'an asexual role'. Irving (2013, p.94) also points out that despite Hugill's publication being over thirty years old at the time the idea that clowns should be androgynous 'is an opinion that persists'.

In her article *The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny* (1974), primary psychological theorist of androgyny Sandra Bem describes an androgynous individual as being '*both* masculine and feminine' (Bem, 1974, p.155; emphasis in original). That is, the self-concept of androgyny in one's gender identity or presentation could allow an individual to 'freely engage in both "masculine" and "feminine" behaviours' (Bem, 1974, p.155). In terms of what these behaviours are, Bem suggests that 'in general, masculinity has been associated with an instrumental orientation, a cognitive focus on "getting the job done"; and femininity has been associated with an expressive orientation, an affective concern for the welfare of others' (Bem, 1974, p. 156). Bem's assertion is that through the use of androgyny an individual would not be 'limited in the range of behaviours available to them as they move from situation to situation' (Bem, 1974, p.155).

However, as Maggie Irving points out in her thesis, *Toward a Female Clown Practice: Transgression, Archetype and Myth* (2013), androgyny in the context of female clown practice is not so straightforward a concept.

While Bem approaches androgyny from a twentieth century American perspective, Irving follows Claid in pointing out the long history of this concept which emerged from the 'homoerotic world of Athenian culture' (Claid, cited in Irving 2013, p.95). In this context androgyny is a 'harmonized union of masculine and feminine qualities in and on one body' (Claid, cited in Irving 2013, p.95), although it was initially associated with young male bodies. This association may have come about because although this body is biologically male, it has not yet developed certain masculine qualities, for example increased production of testosterone, facial hair, or a deeper voice. In a way this also supports de Beauvoir's idea that prior to puberty the body of the female child is practically no different to that of a male child. It must be noted that this version of androgyny is more concerned with the physical body and its biology as opposed to its behavioural identity. It does however serve to display the instability of the term androgyny and its origins.

Irving also uses Claid to point out that other androgynies have developed over time. The 1970s saw the rise of corporeal androgyny which 'signified a rebellion' against the conventional fashion market, for example 'by revealing images of unshaven legs' (Claid, cited in Irving 2013, p.95). This turned in the 1990s where androgyny was more of an aesthetic which 'catered to the conventional fashion market' (Claid, cited in Irving 2013, p.95). Moving into a contemporary setting Claid observes another shift to a more 'feisty' and 'feminist androgynous presence' (Claid, cited in Irving 2013, p.95). This is based more on anger, not necessarily on being angry but on the translation of anger:

> As histories construct bodies, so anger transformed the flesh, gave it a muscular, unbound, expansive, I'm-looking-at-you power (conventional masculine characteristics). The female anatomical body merged with the expressions of masculinity to create the solid grounded, fearless, feminist androgynous presence. (Claid, cited in Irving 2013, p.95).

Terms such as this appear to have become unstable when applied to clown performance. They no longer connect to the idea of both genders being presented by one body, nor do they appear to have the same implications for men and women. Despite the claim from authors such as Hugill (cited in Irving, 2013) that clowns should be androgynous or non-gendered there has been a tendency by authors to use the masculine pronouns "he/his" rather than neutral pronouns such as "they/them".

The use of terms that appear to reflect some kind of neutrality in a way that refers to masculinity is not just limited to clowning. De Beauvoir (1972, p. 74) points out that across societies there is historically a 'universal predominance of males'. According to de Beauvoir men have established themselves in a way that makes them the dominant group and makes women something of an object. She explains this by saying that 'for the male, it is always the male who is the fellow being, the other who is also the same' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.102). Even if men operate in two opposing groups there is an understanding that they are still, to a degree, on the same level. Women, however, 'constitute a part of the property which each of these groups possesses and which is a medium of exchange between them' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p. 102). Although they are the same as men in that they are also people, they are not viewed as being on the same level; they are 'the absolute other' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p. 102). De Beauvoir (1972, p.103) explains that as a group women have 'never

entered into a direct and autonomous relationship with men'. She uses the example of marriage (when this occurred only between men and women), although it is a man and a woman involved in the actual act of marriage, it is two men who have negotiated the trade of this woman from one family to another.

De Beauvoir's categories of gendered otherness can also be applied to clowning. Both historic and recent clown literature shows that in this field there is also a universal predominance of males, as clown author John Towsen acknowledges in a personal blog (2018), when discussing his own book *Clowns* (1975). He writes that the 'book's assumption seems to be that clowns are men, period' (Towsen, 2018). More recently, Peacock describes how a clown is recognized using the "his" pronoun and follows this with the parentheses '(clowns are predominantly male)' (Peacock, 2009, p.15). This consistent reference to clowns as male has resulted in the traditional androgynous clown body becoming synonymous with the male body. As such the male clown can be considered the other who is also the same. Those who do not fit this mould, such as the explicitly female clown, can then be categorised as the absolute other. Subsequently women who wish to clown may feel that to do so successfully would require them to mask parts of the body which could be perceived as explicitly female.

The idea that someone who occupies the space of the absolute other in clowning may not be considered a clown is evidenced by Irving. She recalls that her first clown performance, wherein she emphasised her femininity, 'was considered comic acting, rather than clowning' (Irving, 2013, p.94). Clown author Judith B. Kerman expresses this view of explicitly female clowns in her 1992 article *The Clown as Social Healer*.

She categorises four different clown types: the traditional white face; auguste; hobo; and character clowns. The character clown is essentially the clown in a role. Alongside examples of 'policemen, firemen, babies', she also includes 'all explicitly female clowns' (Kerman, 1992, p.9).

Both Kerman and those critiquing Irving's performance assert that when a woman clown chooses not to mask her femininity, the validity and successfulness of her clowning is brought into question. Even if she does this as a traditional auguste or whiteface, in presenting herself as explicitly female, she is considered a character. This is similar to Peacock's categorisation of clown actors, meaning performers who play the character of a clown, as distinct from circus and theatre clowns. Although they are playing the part of a clown, they are not considered to actually be clowns like the auguste or whiteface is.

Peacock's distinction here appears to mirror how de Beauvoir distinguishes men and women as the other who is also the same and the absolute other, respectively. Men have a 'universal predominance' in society which, as discussed, has resulted in men, even those of opposing groups, viewing one another as being on the same level (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.102). Clowns can appear in a multitude of ways, for example as auguste, whiteface or hobo clowns. Although these clown types all have different aesthetics and personality traits, there is an understanding among practitioners that they are on the same level, that is, they are all clowns. Like men in society, these traditional clown types can be considered the other that is also the same. Women in society are viewed as a separate object, even if they are involved in the same

groups as men they are not on the same level, such as in wedding ceremonies. Clown actors, or character clowns, may operate in the same circles as any traditional clown type, however they are also considered separate and not a fellow member of this group. Just as women in society, the character clown is viewed as the absolute other and this is the category in which Kerman places explicitly female clowns. It has previously been mentioned that, just as de Beauvoir points out about society, there has been a predominance of males in clowning and that the male clown symbolises what the traditional clown looks like. Like the traditional clown, male clowns are also the other who is also the same. It stands to reason then, that authors such as Kerman would categorise explicitly female clowns as characters, thereby making women the absolute other in clowning in the same way that they are the absolute other in society.

There is no mention in clown literature of the explicitly male clown, or of how a clown that presents as masculine should be considered. The idea that a person should mask their sexed characteristics, thereby making their gender moot while clowning, would be acceptable if it were applied equally to both women and men. However, clown literature suggests that only female clown performers are expected to undertake such a responsibility. The evidence of men masking their own gender or adding femininity has been for the purpose of creating the aforementioned characters. For example, in analysing traditional circus clown entrees, Adams & Keene (2012, p.200) describe men wearing balloons as breasts and wild wigs in order to parody female behaviour. These men use an excess of exaggerated femininity. They have not used femininity to achieve any kind of neutrality. Instead, they have created 'grotesque drag representations of the female body' (Davis, cited

in Adams & Keene, 2012, p.200). Thus, the inference of Kerman's only mentioning 'explicitly female clowns' as characters rings true (Kerman, 1992, p.9).

The link that de Beauvoir makes between femininity and otherness is relevant again here. Men parodying as women in clowning do so as another way of signalling their otherness, thus it is feasible that women could use their own femininity for this very purpose. This is something that Irving does in her feminist clown practice that is discussed later, however unlike these men she does not parody femininity but uses real elements of life as a woman to create a collective sense of absolute otherness.

It appears that the identification of the clown as androgynous or gender neutral is not for the purpose of removing sex or gender from its performance, nor does it function to conjoin the binary genders. Instead, it seems that these terms have come to mean the removal of explicit femininity unless it is for the purpose of creating a character. As a result, terms such as androgynous, non-gendered and gender neutral lose their usefulness and become obsolete when applied to clowning.

This raises a question of why, if these terms have come to mean the removal of femininity, clowns are not simply considered masculine. As this thesis will exhibit women have clowned and do clown, and have done so as explicitly feminine, androgynous, and through expressions of masculinity. Within this discussion the use of these gendered traits is measured against the principles of clowning outlined in the previous section of this literature review. This links into why this thesis makes a point of discussing how women clown in relation to gender, because as the literature

discussed thus far shows, it is women who have faced gendered restrictions in clowning.

An alternative approach to gender in clowning is the use of fluidity. Gosling's article *Gender Fluidity Reflected in Contemporary Society* (2018) explains that the term 'has come to convey a wider and more flexible range of gender expression that is not necessarily aligned with the anatomy of the genitalia' (Gosling, 2018, p.76). Gender fluid individuals 'do not feel confined by restrictive boundaries' that are brought about by the 'culturally determined expectations of women and men' (Gosling, 2018, p.76). Most importantly, as the word "fluid" suggests, the way a gender fluid person relates to or chooses to express gender is not set or constant. Identifiers such as the pronouns they prefer may change from "he" to "she" to a 'collective gender-neutral pronoun' such as "they" and their interests or behaviours 'may even change from day to day' (Gosling, 2018, p.76). This is because they may feel 'more female on some days and more male on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately. Their identity is thus seen as being "gender fluid"' (Gosling, 2018, p.76).

Butler's theory of gender performativity reflects the idea that gender is fluid. She explains that when gender is viewed as being constructed independently of sex then 'gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice' (Butler, 2011, p.9). The consequences of this are that, according to Butler (2011, p.9) 'man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one'. Later in the publication Butler uses drag as an example of this as it 'plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the

gender that is being performed' (Butler, 2011, p.187). It would be impossible for a person of any particular gender or sex to convincingly perform the role of the other if gender were a natural occurrence, therefore showing its fluidity.

Gender fluidity allows a person to occupy both male and female identities, separating it from the traditional gender binary. As such it also allows the individual to occupy the space of both the other who is also the same and the absolute other. This identity effectively melts the binary of otherness and makes the concept of otherness as fluid as gender.

Gosling's concept of gender fluidity also shares aspects with Bem's definition of androgyny in that an individual can 'freely engage in both "masculine" and "feminine" behaviours' (Bem, 1974, p.155). How the two differ though is that Bem (1974, p.155) asserts that an engagement in these behaviours is 'dependent on the situational appropriateness'. Gosling's gender fluidity allows for engagement in these behaviours regardless of situational appropriateness, as it is more concerned with the identity and feeling of the individual.

People who do not conform to the gender binary at all also face exclusion as absolute others, both societally and within clown practice. In the article *Foreclosing Fluidity at the Intersection of Gender and Sexual Normativities* (2020), Sumerau et al. gather information from gender fluid individuals about their experiences in society. It is explained here that these individuals are very much aware that in heteronormative society 'fluidity is unexpected and unwelcome' which often results in

feelings of erasure (Sumerau et al., 2020, p.14). In the context of clowning there is no mention of gender fluid or non-binary clowning in clown literature. The examples of men masking their gender, for example using femininity as detailed previously, are not examples of clowns but of characters.

Despite there being no mention of gender non-conforming clowns within the literature, the supposed gender-neutrality of the clown does somewhat embrace the idea of gender non-conformity. This is because the clown is required to be distinct from societal norms, such as the gender binary, and those individuals who are gender fluid or non-binary are already distinct from this binary. Thus, utilising a gender fluid identity within clown performance has the potential to open new avenues of practice, as will be discussed.

 Moving forward this thesis will analyse the use of gender in clown practice. It will utilise de Beauvoir's concepts of the other who is also the same and absolute other as a way of distinguishing performers that are considered clowns from those who are considered characters. Although there is a larger focus on women, particularly in the early chapters, the thesis will later go on to discuss a gender fluid approach to clowning. At this point the thesis aims to show how the binary of both gender and otherness can be dissolved to create a clown practice that is more inclusive than that of the traditional other who is also the same.

The Female History of Clowning

This chapter investigates clown history, with a focus on how women fit into the industry and analysing their clowning in relation to gender through the discussion of two historical female clowns: Evetta Matthews; and Lulu Adams. The purpose of this is to find out what the relationship between gender and clowning was at this time in order to chart its development as the thesis moves into a contemporary context. The analysis will discuss how these women performed and how this relates back to the categories of clown and character, and the categories of other who is also the same and the absolute other. Alongside this, there will also be discussion surrounding how these women were marketed and reported on, and some speculation as to why there were historically so few female clowns in comparison with male clowns.

The period for this analysis is 1895 to the early twentieth century, not because this was when women began to clown but because it is when more detailed information about female clowns is available from. There are records of women performing as clowns as early 1858 however there is unfortunately little to no documentation that exists about these women to analyse their work. The information that is available from 1895, although still somewhat limited, does provide enough detail to analyse a number of female clowns working at this time. It is essential to acknowledge this lack of information in the discussion of female clown history due to the effect that it has on the ability to analyse it fully.

An identifiable theme in clown literature, like in other academic circles as per hooks (2000), has been the tendency to leave out female contributions. It appears to be commonly accepted that women have only recently joined the profession, as clown author John Towson has recently acknowledged. He gives 'a brief re-examination of clown history' (Towsen, 2018) which has a larger focus on women. Within his blog Towsen explains his failure to mention female clowns in his original publication and writes in some detail about where women have appeared in clowning roles, identifying several individuals, including those discussed in this chapter. This is helpful of Towsen (2018), however as he explains, and as was the reason his book did not mention women in the first place, historically there are few female clowns that existed and thus few to write about. It is a problem with female clown history that has been exacerbated by the lack of documentation available on those who did exist. Although the main purpose of this chapter is to provide more context surrounding the overall relationship between clowning and gender, it will also act as a way of documenting some of the work women have contributed to clowning.

The type of clowning discussed in this chapter will be circus, as defined by Peacock (2009). The circus was a key part of the entertainment industry throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. It also has an age-old connection with clowning. At this point in time the circus was the only place a person would encounter a clown, and over time this association has remained in the popular imagination. In the interest of contextualisation this chapter will begin with a look at the role women played in the circus before moving on to the women who worked under the big top as clowns.

Women in the Circus

During the latter years of the nineteenth century the number of women performing in the circus dramatically increased. In their analysis of the role of women in the American circus Adams & Keene provide insight into this surge. By 1880 'the ratio of women to men in circus troupes was about one to fifty' (Adams & Keene, 2012, p.23-24). However, in the years that followed, this rather meagre 2% grew to a 'third to half of the cast by 1910' (Adams & Keene, 2012, pp.23-24).

It is important to note that these women were not in the circus to simply stand and look pretty but had a responsibility to perform as well. Retired clown Charles I. Wiley is cited by the New York Times (1924, p.169) explaining that 'in the old days' women would mostly be used to 'trim up the acts' as little more than a decoration but 'now they were headliners'. One reason for this, as put by circus writer Kenneth Dickinson (cited in Adams & Keene, 2012, pp.23-24), was that 'any act commonly performed by a man became a much greater draw with a woman performing it'. It seems that there was a sort of thrill in seeing women perform risky acts such as horse riding or walking the high wire.

Another important event to acknowledge in the later years of the 19th century was the emergence of the 'New Woman'. This term was brought into general circulation by Sarah Grand in 1894 with an article titled *The New Aspect of the Woman Question.* In it she describes a woman who did not subscribe to the 'Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere' (Grand, 1894, p.271) attitude that was heavily adopted by society at this

time. This was a woman who would not sit quietly while men 'arranged the whole social system' and who would examine 'whether [a man's] abilities and his motives were sufficiently good to qualify him for the task' (Grand, 1894, p.271). The New Woman wanted her education, a voice, and to play a vital role in her society wherein she had control of her life. She wanted to be a man's equal and not his inferior.

The New Woman described here is starkly different to the woman de Beauvoir writes that women are socialised to be. She explains that young girls are taught that to be feminine is to show oneself as 'weak, futile, passive, and docile' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.359). This timidity is one of the ways, according to de Beauvoir, that women show themselves to be the absolute other. Although the New Woman resisted these notions of femininity, putting herself on the same level as men, she still retains her position as the absolute other. This is because the cornerstone of the New Woman is that she resists these notions *as a woman*. Her absolute otherness as a woman is highlighted in this position.

She represented a major cultural shift which, according to Patterson (2008, p.1), 'sparked debate on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world'. As a newly popularised concept people were unsure what exactly the New Woman represented in the current society, and if she was there to stay. Despite her aims she was not viewed as men were, that is, as the other who is also the same, she was viewed as a different kind of woman. It was unclear whether she should be 'celebrated' as an agent of change or if she was a 'traitor to the traditional family' (Patterson, 2008, p.1). The result was that she remained the absolute other, but with a natural curiosity surrounding her existence.

Barnum & Bailey took advantage of the publicity that surrounded this more 'modern, independent woman', and for two years in 1895 and 1896 featured a 'separate ring populated by "New Women"' (Adams & Keene, 2012, p.24). In this ring all of the roles that would ordinarily be taken by men were filled by women, even roles of authority such as the ringmaster. This is also where Matthews performed as a clown. Although this was something of a gimmick, it provided women with the opportunity to train and 'allowed many young women to launch their circus careers' (Adams & Keene, 2012, p.24).

Once again, de Beauvoir's writing on women in society fits here. She writes of women who are 'adventuresses', that they are 'notable less for the importance of their acts than for the singularity of their fates' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.162). This means that it is not the feats themselves that are striking, but the singularity of a scenario in which it is a woman performing them instead of a man. Although this did allow women to find a new career path it kept them in 'a state of dependence' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.171). The reason they were allowed to perform and given their own ring was that their singularity drew in crowds, thereby bringing success and wealth to male circus owners. This success was dependent on their absolute otherness in a space otherwise occupied by the other who is also the same.

Despite this the circus did, in a way, provide opportunities for progression. This reportedly set the circus apart from other areas of the performance industry. One New York Times article states that unlike in Broadway musicals where 'beauty is a

prerequisite for admittance', the circus does not demand 'pulchritude in its women performers […] skill is what the circus demands' (New York Times, 1927, p.25).

However, it must be noted that although employment in the circus was more skills based, beauty and sensuality were advantageous qualities to hold. Circus author Charles T. Murray (1897, p.21) supports this notion as he explains that most circus women, although highly skilled, 'would scarcely bear favourable daylight inspection'. He goes on to point out that the best acts combine both. 'A pudgy woman on horseback excites only laughter, however clever a horsewoman she may be. She breaks the rhythm' (Murray, 1897, p.23). Even if the circus did place greater merit on skill, sex appeal and the willingness to flaunt it could still certainly help women enter the circus.

The New Woman is a good fit for this role at this time. No longer kept in the sphere of her home, where her sexuality was strictly limited to function for her husband, she took it under her own control. Although sex appeal was not essential to the New Woman, she had the agency to flaunt her sexuality if she wished. This was on account of her being 'threateningly independent' and 'sexually in charge' (Jones cited in Irving, 2013, p.129) which at the time were viewed as masculine attributes. The New Woman also had to be skilful in order to maintain this independence and be self-sufficient. This explains why at this time of skilled women joining the ranks of the circus that the New Woman became such a large part of this industry.

In spite of this threatening independence and control over her sexuality though, the New Woman in the circus still must be considered as the absolute other. Though she may be skilled and usurp prerogatives of masculinity she is bound to be perceived as the absolute other because this is how the circus wants her to be seen. She cannot occupy the space of the other who is also the same because her femininity is a requirement. There is an emphasis placed on the fact that she is a woman in a male space. She requires her own circus ring because femininity is a spectacle in the circus. As such the New Woman is fated to occupy the space of the absolute other.

Despite claims that the circus was the perfect place for skilled women to launch their careers, this was not without restrictions. In Adams' & Keene's (2012) analysis of women in the circus they list types of female performers, describing each one with a simple title such as equestrians or tiger trainers. This is until the mention of clowning: 'the few women allowed to appear as clowns' (Adams & Keene, 2012, p.26). This indicates that not only were female clowns a rarity in comparison to their male counterparts but that this reduced number was the result of women not being permitted to take part.

This is reflected by Wiley who described women as 'headliners' (New York Times, 1924, p.169). In the case of clowning, he states that there is 'everything but women clowns' (New York Times, 1924, p.169). By this point Matthews and Adams had both performed in the circus. Wiley's failure to acknowledge their contributions or even their existence is indicative of the support female clowns received from others in their industry.

Evetta Matthews & Lulu Adams

The "lady clowns" that will be discussed in this chapter are Evetta Matthews (born Josephine Evetta Matthews, dates unknown) and Lulu Adams (born Louise Craston, b. 1900, d. unknown). Both of these women were born into British circus families, and both had fathers who performed as clowns. Matthews' father by her own account 'was a clown for forty years' (New York Times, 1895, p.27), and Adams' father was previously an acrobatic rider but took to clowning after sustaining multiple injuries (Barrutia-Wood, 2016). Their entrances into clowning differ though.

Despite her familial connection to both the circus and clowning, Matthews was not met with support upon sharing her career choice. In an interview she recalled: 'my people laughed at me when I told them I was going to be a clown' (New York Times, 1895, p.27). At some point after expressing her desire to clown Matthews moved to America where she had her debut clown performance in the New Woman Ring as a member of Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth in 1895.

In contrast it is reported that Adams' 'aptitude for clowning developed early in life' (Barrutia-Wood, 2016, p.108), and she was encouraged by her family to pursue this. In fact, Adams 'appeared many times with her father in clown entrees' (Barrutia-Wood, 2016, p.108). She continued to perform with her family until she met her husband, theatre manager and clown Albert Victor Adams, in 1927 with whom she formed a double act: Albertino and Lulu. This act brought Adams to circuses across

both Britain and America where she performed with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey (Barrutia-Wood, 2016).

A notable similarity in Matthews' and Adams' careers was the spectacle created around their gender. In a poster advertising the Greatest Show on Earth from 1895 (figure 1) Matthews is billed as "Evetta the Only Lady Clown with the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth". This is technically true in the sense that with this circus she was the only lady clown at that time. It does however also infer this as a general statement, as do media reports written at the time. The aforementioned New York Times article from this same year also describes Matthews as 'the only lady clown on Earth' (New York Times, 1895, p.27). It also claims she is a woman who had 'invaded this branch of the profession' (New York Times, 1895, p.27), suggesting that she is not just presently the only lady clown but also the first.

Figure 1: 1895 poster by Barnum & Bailey featuring Evetta Matthews (The Ringling, 2018).

Adams was also given this title as a female clown and was 'believed to be the first in a British circus' (Daily Mail, 1934, p.11). As I have been unable to locate any evidence in either news or academic sources of a predecessor to Adams in Britain, it is possible that this is true. However, both Adams and Matthews were born and performed in Britain with their family circuses, meaning it is also possible that Matthews may have begun clowning here prior to Adams.

Other media surrounding Adams, such as an advertisement for a performance with Tom Arnold's Christmas Circus at Harringay, also styled her as 'the only fe[m]ale clown in the world' (Harringay Online, 2011 website). Even more recently an article

in *The Sun* featured a photograph of Adams (figure 2) with the caption describing her as the 'only woman clown in the world' (The Sun, 2018). At this point Adams had already passed away making such a claim impossible. In America it was said of Adams appearing with Barnum & Bailey as a lady clown that it was the 'first time we've ever had one […] first time anybody's ever had one […] first time there's ever been one, in fact' (New York Times, 1939, p.33). This is despite this same circus attaching the same title to Matthews several decades earlier. It is unclear as to whether Matthews was also still performing at this time with a different circus as the documentation of her career is limited to her appearances with Barnum & Bailey in 1895.

1942: A couple of clowns joke with children at the circus at Chessington Zoo. One of them is Lulu, the only woman clown in the world Credit: Hulton Archive - Getty

Figure 2: Photograph of Lulu Adams describing her as 'the only woman clown in the world' (The Sun, 2018).

Matthews' career prevents Adams from being accurately labelled as the world's first or only female clown. However, the earliest record of a female clown identified by researchers was actually Amelia Butler in 1858, appearing in James M. Nixon's Great American Circus thirty-five (Adams & Keene, 2012) meaning it cannot be true for Matthews either. Adams & Keene (2012, pp.201-202) point out this was common practice, 'each decade publicity portrayed a woman as the "first" or "only"' female clown'. They provide the example of Lorreta LaPearl who in 1927, over three decades after Matthews' debut, was described in *Popular Mechanics* as "the only woman circus clown" (Adams & Keene, 2012, p.201-202). This demonstrates a tendency to sensationalise women appearing as clowns, and a clear marketing strategy which has been recycled time and time again to generate excitement and ticket sales.

Both Matthews and Adams are good examples of the previously discussed 'adventuresses' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.162). Not only are they women occupying a male space, but it is also the space that even future authors claimed was never occupied by a woman. By putting their gender to the forefront of their circus appearances, circus owners made a spectacle of Matthews' and Adams femininity. As a result, the importance of their acts is de-emphasized in lieu of 'the singularity of their fates' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.162).

This spectacle of the female clown perpetuated by circus owners and the media signals the women's absolute otherness within the sphere of clowning. They are nothing like the traditional male clowns, the other who is also the same, that one

would expect to see. In terms of clowning principles, one could try to argue that their distinctness is a source of otherness that might be drawn upon for the purposes of clowning. This is not what Matthews' and Adams' are doing though. They are attempting to fill the space of the other that is also the same whilst remaining explicitly female, thereby separating them from the traditional male clown figure. The continued emphasis on their singularity within this space through terms such as first or only lady clown suggests that the one holding this title is not really a member of the profession but is filling a role created by the circus for marketing purposes. She is a character, and so cannot occupy the space of the other that is also the same.

The idea that the female clown at this time was a character as opposed to a clown is made more evident by the personas used by Matthews and Adams. As previously mentioned, Matthews was one of the performers in Barnum & Bailey's New Woman ring and this was the image she portrayed in all areas of her clowning. In the Barnum & Bailey poster (figure 1) Matthews' costume bears the attributes of both masculinity and femininity, it is loose fitting with large, balloon like trousers. This creates a more masculine silhouette but does not serve to disguise Matthews as a man as it also contains more traditionally feminine touches such as bows at the shoulder and ruffles at the waist with a neat white wig atop her head. These explicitly feminine touches are a signal of Matthews' absolute otherness and her distinct difference from the so-called gender-neutral aesthetic of the other who is also the same which has become synonymous with the male body.

In comparison to Matthews, Adams' aesthetic was rooted entirely in explicit femininity. She would appear in a 'curled white wig, white face grease and spangles' (Barrutia-Wood, 2016, p.110). Her aesthetic seems to derive from Hollywood glamour, recognised through 'sharply drawn eyebrows and lashes, perfect painted dark lip and waved bob hair' (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p.97). These features appear in Adams' costume, but in an exaggerated fashion (figure 3). This aesthetic was already believed to be transgressive as it 'not only exaggerated but parodied the desirable upper-middle class femininity' (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p.96). It also appeared as a new kind of feminism. Unlike the New Woman who used expressions of masculinity for empowerment, Hollywood glamour utilised the ownership of one's femininity as a means of empowerment. Her sensuality was her own and not something that could be controlled or removed by societal pressures to settle down and have children. A woman identifying with this style was seen as rebelling against traditional roles, it 'marked a refusal to slip seamlessly into one's place as wife and mother' (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p.97).

Figure 3: Lulu Adams in one of her distinct clown costumes. (Barrutia-Wood, 2016).

Unlike Matthews, Adams' clown aesthetic was more socially acceptable. Although the style itself was considered to be transgressive, it was not unpopular. Buckley & Fawcett (2002, p.97) explain that because Hollywood glamour was 'far removed from the realities of life' it became popular with young working girls. Adams falls into this category as she is from a working background having been born into a circus. As such instead of signalling her otherness from societal gender norms, Adams has exaggerated these norms. Because Adams chose to exaggerate fashionably transgressive femininity and not deviate from it in any way, she remains the absolute other, both in the context of society and clowning. Matthews on the other hand does bear some of the attributes of the other that is also the same in her more masculine

costume, however her gender is still made explicit, meaning she continues to occupy the space of the absolute other.

The male circus clowns performing in the early twentieth century alongside Adams, and at the same time as Matthews, utilised a grotesque aesthetic. This further emphasizes the difference between Adams and Matthews from these men. These differences are clearest when looking at Adams next to her husband and double act partner Albert (figure 4). Albert, a traditional auguste, is pictured wearing badly fitting clothes, a balding head and a bulbous red nose. Seated next to him is Adams, donning a glamorous floor length dress and feminine makeup. She does not wear a red nose but does have the additions of a pleated collar and pointed hat which are somewhat reminiscent of a traditional whiteface clown aesthetic. Adams' position as a clown is diminished next to Albert. His aesthetic completely opposes the dress code of normative society and fits the model of the traditional other who is also the same. Adams' socially acceptable use of femininity does the opposite, clearly marking her as the absolute other. The result is that Adams appears more like a character, a woman who is only playing the role of a clown.

Figure 4: Lulu and Albertino entertaining children at Chessington Zoo in 1942. (The Sun, 2018).

Harris (1999, p.122) describes how 'a woman who usurps 'masculine' prerogatives […] may assume a mask of 'excessive womanliness' as a defence mechanism to avoid punishment'. Adams' took advice from her father when creating her clown aesthetic, he 'told her not to go for the grotesque but try to be feminine' (Toulmin cited in Davison, 2013, p.125). Although his reasoning for this is not recorded, it is appropriate to speculate that he was aware of how difficult it would be for his daughter, a woman, to succeed in the male dominated clown industry. Previously discussed evidence suggested that her singularity as a lady clown was key to women like Adams having the opportunity to clown at all. In utilising her 'excessive womanliness' the act of 'displaying her masculinity' by occupying a clowning space appears less serious – 'something not real, a joke' (Harris, 1999, p. 122). This kind of explicit femininity fits into what Kerman (1992) describes as a character clown, further strengthening the argument that at this point in time lady clown was

considered as more of a role to be played than as a female member of the clowning profession.

This can also be applied to Matthews. As the New Woman she was able usurp a masculine position somewhat more freely, however this required the balance of excessive womanliness. The New Woman was still a new concept that society, and audiences, had not yet made their minds up about. There was a risk that audiences may have found her too intimidating, too much of a change from what they expected a woman to be. By constantly reminding the audience that she is still a woman, that she is still the absolute other and not the other who is also the same, Matthews' masculinity 'appears only as a 'role'' (Harris, 1999, p.123)

This argument is strengthened by male clowns performing at the same time as Matthews who are recorded to have simply found her amusing, 'they do not regard her as a serious competitor or believe that any other women are likely to follow her example' (New York Times, 1895, p.27). These comments infer that Matthews was not really a clown but a novelty that happened to take on the image of a clown. Adams also came under this category as she was described by the Daily Mail (1934, p.11) as 'Britain's first woman clown: an Olympia Novelty'. Any clowning skill is diminished in favour of their novelty value. As a result, the female clown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century can be categorised as the absolute other, they are not a clown but a character.

Matthews and Adams worked under Barnum & Bailey in America. This was where Matthews became the New Woman, this has already been discussed aesthetically and as a marketable character, but it was also central to Matthews' physical performances. One of these is described in a New York Times Article (1895, p.27). With her costume disguised under a bonnet and long cloak, Matthews would sit in the audience next to 'some innocent young man' and remain here for part of the show, whilst he became preoccupied by the performances (New York Times, 1895, p.27). Suddenly Matthews 'astonishes him by shouting to the ring master for a job' and she is offered ten dollars by the ring master to join the show (New Times, 1895, p.27). As a further shock to the man beside her, Matthews would call back saying this man was her fiancé and had offered more money for her to remain in her place. Eventually Matthews removes her disguise and enters the ring as a New Woman and a lady clown.

Once again Matthews takes on a position of masculinity through the use of absolute otherness. The act of disobeying her pretend fiancé is 'threateningly independent' and 'sexually in charge' (Jones cited in Irving, 2013, p.129), however she does this whilst revealing herself to be a woman. This is entirely in the spirit of the New Woman who considers her own desires above those of her husband and rejects the 'Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere' attitude (Grand, 1894, p.271).). Matthews shows that she will not abide by 'Victorian ideals of domesticity' (Davis, 2002, p.83), not out of a failure to understand them but out of refusal, in favour of her own ideals.

In a way this act fits with McManus' (2003) view that clowns can free themselves of rules by disregarding them in favour of their own. However, McManus makes it clear that this solution should come from the performer's own clown logic, whereas Matthews' solution comes from her position as the New Woman. It is this image that creates conflict when analysing Matthews' career alongside clowning principles. The purpose of the New Woman is to give women the agency to succeed, however clowning principles dictate that the clown must fail. This failure results in vulnerability which in turn helps the clown forge a connection with their audience.

The New Woman cannot do this as her purpose is to be empowering, not vulnerable. The act described is rooted in this empowerment, it is the act of the New Woman taking control of her own life and body. As previously discussed, female clowns were viewed as a kind of novelty and Matthews' New Woman image was a part of this. Her act could only be recreated by a New Woman, it was not something that a male clown, who occupies the space of the other who is also the same, could do. As such this performance is further evidence that Matthews occupied the space of the absolute other and this was necessary to be able to play the role of a clown.

This becomes even more apparent considering that this New Woman persona was dictated by Barnum & Bailey. Despite claiming to one media outlet that she had a 'pretty wide latitude' of control in her acts (New York Times, 1895, p.27), other outlets claim that Bailey had placed 'severe gendered restrictions' on Matthews which forbade her 'access to full physical clowning' (Adams & Keene, 2012, p.203). Within these restrictions Matthews was 'not allowed to tumble and somersault like

ordinary men clowns' (Adams & Keene, 2012, p.203). This was despite the fact that

she was an 'expert contortionist' (Adams & Keene, 2013, p.203), or that other circus

women such as trapeze artists and animal trainers were performing acts with a

similar and significantly higher level of risk involved. The only reason given for these

restrictions was that 'Mr Bailey did not approve' (Adam & Keene, 2012, p.203).

Barnum & Bailey created the role of New Woman lady clown for Matthews to fit into.

There is no sense of Lecoq's inner clown, which would see Matthews expose a

hidden, unsocialised version of herself. This makes sense as the concept of the

inner clown did not emerge until 'Lecoq's early experiments with clown teaching in

the early 1960s' (Davison, 2016, p.4). To fulfil her ambition of clowning, she had to

abide by the gendered restrictions placed on her by Barnum & Bailey, therefore

conforming to social expectations. This then firmly places Matthews in the category

of a woman playing a clown and not a clown who happens to be female. To clarify,

this is not a criticism of Matthews, there does appear to be a desire from her to be

fully involved in clowning. However, this was made impossible by her employers on

account of her gender at the time which she existed.

Matthews' career exemplifies de Beauvoir's' theories on men and women in society.

She writes that history shows men to hold all the power, they have kept women in 'a

state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her, and thus she

has been definitely established as the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.171). Matthews

started her career being laughed at for wanting to be a clown, and when she had the

opportunity, she was still not granted permission to do so as the traditional male

clown. She was separated into the New Woman ring and made to fulfil this role of the absolute other in every way. For her to have a career in clowning Matthews had to do as the circus owners demanded. They were in control of her act, and she was dependent on them to keep her role as lady clown. She was limited here. Just as de Beauvoir writes about women generally, Matthews was 'enclosed, limited, dominated by the male universe' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.325). Despite her success in breaking through expectations of what women could do Matthews could not break away from male control.

Adams also experienced this during her time working with Barnum & Bailey in America. Unfortunately, it is not known how much of this pertained to her acts, as information about these both in Britain and America is not available. There is documentation which evidences significant aesthetic changes, though, when Adams was employed by Barnum & Bailey.

In a New York Times (1939, p.33) article Adams is described as being 'remodelled' for her 1939 American debut. Circus press agent Roland Butler called her Hollywood glamour aesthetic 'positively a knockout' (New York Times, 1939, p.33). This was not what the American circus wanted though. Butler recalled Adams being told 'you're no clown, you're a showgirl' (New York Times, 1939, p.33) and a showgirl was not what they were looking for. In the previous analysis of Adams' aesthetic, it was explained that her use of Hollywood glamour was far removed from that of any of her more traditional male counterparts. As with Matthews it seems that Barnum & Bailey wanted Adams to stand out from women in society, with the intention of capitalising

on the lady clown's singularity. This also served to bring Adams' aesthetic here closer to that of the male other who is also the same. Butler describes how the 'idealising' make up she wore in Britain and Europe was 'scraped off and scrapped', replaced instead with a 'thick layer of grease […] eyebrows shaped like croquet hoops […] nose painted like a red heart […] the traditional tear streaks' (New York Times, 1939, p.33). In doing this the American circus has brought Adams' slightly more in line with the more traditional male clown aesthetic.

Once again Barnum & Bailey have dictated the type of clown that Adams must be in order to perform with them. By not allowing Adams' to choose her aesthetic Barnum & Bailey have also, as they did with Matthews, prevented the possibility of Adams exploring a hidden side or inner clown. Lady clown was the role they wanted Adams to play. This is further evidenced by Butler in the New York Times (1939, p.33) article as he explains that 'the circus didn't want a show girl, it wanted a lady clown'. There was no discussion with Adams about how she would appear, these men had already decided.

Like Matthews, Adams is still under male control. Even at the start of her career it was her father who told her the kind of aesthetic that she should and should not use. In America she was kept in this 'state of dependence' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p. 171). She could not refuse Barnum & Bailey's request without risking her role as a lady clown. Adams' success in this male owned industry was built off the advice and demands of these men.

An important observation to make here is the potential effect that making the lady clown a character and role to play as opposed to the equivalent of a traditional male clown may have had on the number of women in the profession. By making this a role the number of female clowns performing is limited to the number of roles available. This is amplified by use of titles such as first or only, Matthews' and Adams' experiences show that part of the lady clown's value is in her singularity. Therefore, if this role limited to being the one and only of its kind by the circuses who would employ them, women are denied the opportunity to expand their place in the field. This of course is speculation as the specific number of female clowns active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is unavailable. The task of finding this information is also made more difficult due to the fact that many 'early female clowns aren't acknowledged as female clowns because they dressed as men' (Broadway cited in Clown Power Live S01E01, Dave Zoo Logical, 2020). However, despite the absence of exact statistics it is appropriate to speculate that making the lady clown a limited role would also limit the number of women able to pursue a clowning career.

What is evident from these lady clowns' careers is that women who clowned during this period attempted to use absolute otherness to occupy that of the male spaces. This was not possible though, due to the constant emphasis on their singularity as lady clowns throughout their careers, aesthetically, in performance and in the media. The role of lady clown was created by male circus owners, their 'codes of law have been set up against her' so that she remained in 'a state of dependence' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.171). Within this role women were not permitted full access to clowning on account of their gender.

There is still evidence of clowning principles in the works of Matthews and Adams though, for example in Matthews' New Woman image and Adams' American circus aesthetic. However, it must be acknowledged that even this has limitations. In embodying the New Woman Matthews could not fully commit to principles such as failure and vulnerability. Adams, though her behaviour cannot be commented on, had her choices limited by Barnum & Bailey, and her British aesthetic adhered too closely to societal gender norms. This means she did not fit the model of the traditional male clown, who occupied the space of the other who is also the same. As such both women fit more accurately into the category of character clown and absolute other. The character they played was that of the first or only lady clown which they were required to perform because of the gendered restrictions placed on them.

Annie Fratellini

The next clown that will be discussed is French circus clown Annie Fratellini (1932-1997). This chapter, like the previous one, will look at Fratellini's position as a clown in relation to gender, linking this back to de Beauvoir's categories of otherness. Fratellini also functions as a transitional figure between historical and contemporary female clowning. As Davison (2013, p.121) explains 'a major feature of clowning at the end of the 20th century was the large number of women clowns active in the field'. This was a gradual shift that Fratellini's experience reflects.

Like Matthews and Adams, Fratellini was born into the circus industry, as a member of the prolific Fratellini family. Her grandfather Paul and uncles Albert and François made up the famous clown trio the Fratellini Brothers, and her father Victor also performed as a clown. Despite her close connections, Fratellini did not pursue a career in clowning until later in life. She left the circus in 1956, returning fifteen years later as part of a clowning duo with her husband Pierre Étaix.

Fratellini had first-hand experience of the dismissal of women from clowning, mainly from her family. Similar to Matthews', Fratellini's family did not see this as a career for a woman. Fratellini recalls that as a child her father would take her to the Médrano circus almost every Thursday to watch the clowns training. Here he 'kept repeating: "What a pity you are not a boy, you could be a clown"' (Fratellini cited in Silva, 1997). Matthews had faced laughter at the idea of her becoming a female clown, Fratellini was raised to believe it was a complete impossibility.

This is a first-hand example of a woman being othered because of her gender. Fratellini's male relatives dictated what her place in the circus was. This links back to de Beauvoir's theory of male dominance in that 'their codes of law have been set up against her, and thus she has been definitely established as the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.172). The choice for Fratellini not to clown until later in life was not her own, it was a result of her socialisation in a patriarchal industry.

As previously established the views of Fratellini's father towards female clowns was a common one which would remain with her throughout her career. In her own words Fratellini describes clowning as 'l'apanage des hommes. Il n'y a pas de féminin au mot clown' (Fratellini, 1989, p.168) [2]. Despite describing clowning as a perogative of men, Fratellini is clear that clowning should not only lack femininity, but gender as whole; she viewed the clown as asexual (Fratellini, 1989). Her daughter Valérie, who performed alongside Fratellini later in her career, clarifies this further. She explains that for herself and for her mother 'il n'y a pas un clown femme ou homme. Il y a le clown, point' (Fratellini, 2002) [3]. Fratellini believed the clown to be a figure that was absent of gender. This shows how Fratellini had experienced and internalised the 'universal predominance of males' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.74) in the clowning industry.

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[2] 'The prerogative of men. There is no feminine in clown' (translated by the author).
[3] 'There is no such thing as a female or male clown. There is clown, period' (translated by the author).

As the literature review pointed out, the figure of the non-gendered clown has become synonymous with masculinity. Fratellini's early experiences of clowning with her father and later career reflect this. As a child she was consistently reminded that she could not be a clown because she had been born a girl, thereby instilling the idea that clowns are masculine. Her upbringing also established Fratellini's absolute otherness from the men around her. When Fratellini began her career in clowning, she did so by using a more traditionally masculine clown mask. Her daughter Valérie explains that this also had a more personal effect on Fratellini, who she describes as 'honte d'être femme' (Fratellini, 2002) [4]. This was then passed from Fratellini to Valérie: 'je n'ai eu de cesse de cacher ma féminité' (Fratellini, 2002) [5].

In a way Fratellini perpetuated the view that femininity equates to absolute otherness in clowning because her path into it was with a masculine clown mask. This does not mean Fratellini's career was not progressive, as will be discussed, however it is still important to acknowledge at this point.

Fratellini performed as an auguste, wearing baggy clothing, a short, brightly coloured wig, and a bowler hat (figure 5). Unlike the clowns discussed previously, Fratellini utilises the grotesqueness of the traditional male circus clowns. Matthews and Adams attempted to occupy the space of the other that is also the same using absolute otherness. Fratellini occupies this space more successfully in terms of her

[4] 'Ashamed to be a woman' (translated by the author).
[5] 'I never stopped hiding my femininity' (translated by the author).

aesthetic by using the traditional male clown aesthetic to mask her absolute otherness.

In using the traditional male clown aesthetic as a form of agency to clown Fratellini simultaneously rejects and conforms to the gendered restrictions placed on her by her father. The act of becoming a clown is evidence of her rejection of the notion that a person of her born sex cannot fit into this role, however she has also accepted for her to do so she must mask her femininity. Although Fratellini did recognise herself as a female clown, she does still reinforce the traditional view that the absolute other, or explicitly female clown, is not actually a clown at all.

Figure 5: Annie Fratellini and Pierre Étaix performing at the Cirque d'Hiver in 1970 (Circopedia, 2018).

Fratellini's choice of aesthetic clearly signals her otherness in a way that both deviates from societal norms and fits into the space of the traditional male clown. However, in a way her otherness becomes limited as this aesthetic is the result of gendered restrictions placed on Fratellini at a young age. Male clowns, as the previous chapter demonstrated, were the norm, and Fratellini was brought up believing the explicitly female clown was non-existent.

In her discussion of the absence of femininity in clowning, Fratellini proposes this as a reason that more women do not engage with it. For Fratellini one must let go of societal beauty standards and so 'Inconsciemment peut-être, les femmes ne souhaitaient pas s'enlaider' (Fratellini, 1989, p.168) [6]. Beauty standards are not naturally occurring, but over time there have been certain expectations put on women for them to be considered beautiful, relating back to the gendered stylization of the body (Butler, 2011, p.xv). It was mentioned in the previous chapter that women have historically been socialised to link the concepts of beauty and value (hooks, 2000), Thus, it makes sense that to let go of these standards may be a deterrent for women from any activity.

Peacock also proposes this using a comparison between an actor in a play and a clown. She writes that 'when actresses make themselves ugly, they do so to perform a character distinct from themselves' (Peacock, 2009, p.96). The character is a protective barrier, it is not the performer that is ugly by societal standards but the character. However, 'when a clown performer makes up as his or her clown persona,

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[6] 'Perhaps unconsciously, women did not want to look ugly' (translated by the author).

he/she is undergoing a transformation which reveals hidden facets of his or her personality to the audience' (Peacock, 2009, p.96). This relates back to Lecoq's notion of an inner clown, that reflects a performer's hidden self, which emerged around a decade before Fratellini began her clowning career. Thus, when deviating from constructed gender norms as a clown, you are not simply performing outside of gender boundaries but revealing how you as a person do not fit into such boundaries.

Despite believing that letting go of societal standards of feminine beauty may deter other women, this was not the case for Fratellini. She explains: 'Je n'ai jamias eu le sentiment de m'endlaidir, mais de me faire belle' (Fratellini, 1989, p.168)[7]. This implies that in stripping away society's idea of feminine beauty in her clowning, Fratellini reveals a hidden self that does not relate to what society considers beautiful.

Fratellini considers her clown persona to be inherited from her family of clowns (Fratellini, 1989). She could not express this persona when she performed with them though, instead she was made out to be the absolute other who could not clown. Fratellini's use of the traditional male clown mask speaks to the effect of her socialisation. It is not surprising really that her clown persona mirrors the clowns she grew up with and, in a way, she has reclaimed this mask. She no longer views herself as the absolute other because her mask allows her to occupy the space of

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[7] 'I never had the feeling to make myself ugly, but to make myself beautiful' (translated by the author).

the other who is also the same. It is unknown whether Fratellini consciously used Lecoq's notion of an inner clown. However, her belief that her clown persona was inherited and her views towards shedding her feminine beauty are evidence that Fratellini's persona was a reflection of a hidden self. This is a development from the clowns discussed previously who were told exactly what kind of clown they should be.

Fratellini's performances also differ from those of Matthews and Adams in relation to gender. They exploited femininity as a novelty to create a spectacle, Fratellini had far simpler intentions: 'de faire rire'[8] (Fratellini, 1989, p.168). Images of the New Woman and Hollywood glamour are replaced with simplicity and light heartedness, as a clown she did as her male relatives had done before her: she just clowned. In one act Fratellini's husband Pierre, the whiteface to her auguste, sits on a tipped chair, allowing Fratellini to sit counterbalanced on the unsupported side while she plays the clarinet. Pierre stands which causes Fratellini to fall in confusion at what has taken place. Later Fratellini somehow sits on the unsupported side of the chair without Pierre as a counterbalance which then causes him to become confused. Pierre removes the chair from underneath Fratellini but she remains in her seated position playing the clarinet. This prompts Pierre to sit on the unsupported side of the chair at which point he is the one who falls.

In terms of clowning principles, Fratellini's aesthetic and confusion at falling where there is nothing to support her signal her lack of understanding towards simple rules

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[8] 'to make people laugh' (translated by the author).

and concepts such as gravity. She also disregards these rules in favour of her own later in the act, her own rules stipulating that she does not need forces such as gravity to hold her up. Fratellini finds this whole exchange amusing, despite her confusion making her appear somewhat stupid and therefore vulnerable. She invites the audience to continue paying her attention as she attempts to play her clarinet for them. By the end of the act, they are laughing with her, both because of her own silliness and that of her partner. There is no real sense of gendered behaviour here, as such Fratellini's performance occupies the space of the other who is also the same. She may technically be a female clown, making her a singular adventuress, but in the stripping of her femininity, and thus her absolute otherness, it is the act she performs that is important to her audience and not the 'singularity of her fate[s]' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.162).

It is a more traditional clown act, like those her male relatives would perform. In a way this makes the act somewhat historical in nature however the fact that the performer is female is evidence of a shift in clowning. Fratellini puts herself on the same level as a male clown, something Matthews and Adams failed to do because of their explicit femininity occupying the space of the absolute other. Fratellini's use of the traditional clown mask and model of performance, that is a neutral or masculinised one, removes her from this space. Instead, she occupies the space of the other who is also the same. In doing so, Fratellini is able to view herself as no different from a male clown despite her actually being a woman. This persona was something she saw as being inherited; this was a space where Fratellini felt she belonged. She had asserted her status as an occupier of the space belonging to the other who is also the same.

The concept of status is viewed as a barrier to female clowning by authors such as Peacock. She writes that due to the essentiality of failure 'to play the clown means giving away status' (Peacock, 2009, p.96). Women are challenged then due to not having held high status to begin with, as evidenced by authors such as de Beauvoir (1972) and hooks (2000). For example, in the period discussed previously, women were held to 'Victorian ideals of domesticity' (Davis, 2002, p.83) and expected to be subservient. Subsequently this means they held very little status in society. This becomes an issue for female clowns as 'status is only readily given away by those whose status in society is secure' (Peacock, 2009, p.96). It is easier for a man whose status is granted by his gender to relinquish status as a clown because he is still a man while doing so. Therefore, it can be no surprise that 'that most clowns in western society have been white men' (Peacock, 2009, p.96).

Fratellini, although not pretending to be a man, is able to gain status through her transformation from absolute other to other that is also the same. As such when performing she can then relinquish this status as a clown. This was impossible for Matthews, for example, whose New Woman image was integral to her ability to work as a clown. Matthews had a character that she needed to maintain, whereas Fratellini is not playing a character. Instead, she more fully embodies the traditional male clown role and successfully occupies the space of the other that is also the same.

A large part of her transition from historical to contemporary clown was Fratellini's role in creating new opportunities within the circus industry. In 1974 she opened her circus school, École Nationale du Cirque Annie Fratellini, which was one of Paris', and Europe's, first two professional circus schools. As previously mentioned, the circus was not usually a place where outsiders were welcome and Fratellini's school challenged this tradition. Women were among these groups of outsiders who were now granted access to clown training. Unlike in the previous chapter, these women did not have to make a spectacle of their gender to enter the ring. Fratellini's school was, and still is, a place where women can occupy a space previously reserved for the traditional male clown.

Fratellini bridges the historical and contemporary in this analysis. Her success as a clown can be attributed to the stripping of her femininity which removed her from the space of the absolute other. Fratellini did not view this as a sacrifice, instead believing this to be her destiny, something inherited from the men she thought she could never occupy the same space as. This speaks to the possibility of an inner clown and is more in line with contemporary clown practices, such as those created by Lecoq. By not creating a spectacle of absolute otherness, Fratellini avoids being labelled a character. It is through her transformation from absolute other to other that is also the same, that Fratellini acquired the necessary status she needed to gain full access to clowning. As a clown, she was then able to relinquish this status in the same way as her male counterparts. Finally, she provided opportunities for other women to clown through her institution.

Fratellini clowned in a way that made her gender largely irrelevant. Her performative adoption of masculinity through traditional clowning freed her from absolute otherness. This allowed her to occupy the space of the other who is also the same and be considered a clown, not a character. Although this appears to be due to gender restrictions placed on Fratellini as a child, she has arguably broken through these and found a way to use them to her advantage. She could not clown as the absolute other, so she utilised her inherited, traditionally male, clown mask. This gave her the agency to clown as her male relatives clowned and develop the position women could hold as clowns.

Next this thesis looks forward to the use of gender in contemporary clowning. As a result, it also moves away from the circus in lieu of other spaces the clown now inhabits, such as the theatre.

Contemporary Clowning

This final chapter discusses clowning and gender in a contemporary context. It moves away from the circus as this is no longer the primary source of clowning in the modern day. The late twentieth century saw an increase in the number of working female clowns and the practice had moved largely out of the big top, becoming more popular in theatres.

I have selected two clowns to analyse: Maggie Irving and Angela de Castro, who reflect changes that have occurred[9]. Irving brings an academic perspective whilst de Castro remains very much in the realm of performance. This reflects a more balanced view on how clowning's relationship with gender has changed, and how views on this subject have developed.

Maggie Irving

Maggie Irving is a British clown and comedy teacher based in Exeter. Unlike the other female clowns discussed in this thesis, she does not come from a traditional circus or clowning background. Irving (2013) began as a classically trained actor and ran her own theatre company. In her forties Irving enrolled at the University of Plymouth to complete a Theatre & Performance degree which is where she first discovered clowning (Irving, 2013). As will be discussed, Irving's clowning is

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[9] Birth dates are not provided for Irving and de Castro as these are unknown.

completely different to that discussed thus far; she embraces the space of the absolute other and drives her audience into this space with her.

Although Irving says of her early clowning experience that she 'loved it' (Clown Power Live, S01E01, Dave Zoo Logical, 2020), she also struggled to find a method of clowning that suited her. During her first clown performance Irving (2013, p.91) used an unsocialised and explicitly female clown mask: 'five-inch platform shoes, a short skirt and low-cut top'. This choice of aesthetic was unlike her 'normal self' (Irving, 2013, p.91) who would be considered socially acceptable. Her exposed female anatomy and the effect her high heeled shoes had on her ability to move are a signal of her absolute otherness.

In this performance Irving approached young male students, asking them "do you fancy me?" and upon their rejection stumbled away only to turn back to look at them 'with sad, appealing eyes, for signs of love, but to no avail' (Irving, 2013, p.92). Irving (2013, p.92) explains that this clown had come about as she was going through a divorce and that it reflected a hidden side of herself: 'a single mother, a student and a lonely woman looking for love'. Her clown mask had given her the agency to express this hidden side 'without owning up to be this person' (Irving, 2013, p.92). This explicit and unsocialised female clown can then be considered Irving's inner clown.

The idea that this persona is a woman looking for love comes across throughout the performance. Her exaggerated feminine appeal, the direct and pointed requests of

affection, the over-the-top reaction to rejection and desperate looking for signs of acceptance. This all represented 'the search for love and the ridiculous lengths to which people go to find it' (Irving, 2013, p.92). Again, this was a part of her personal and private life story at that time. On reflection, Irving describes the performance as subversive. She failed, yet she felt powerful. Her status would alternate between low 'through failing to win the boy' and then high by 'creating laughter through the "appeal"' (Irving, 2013, p.92). By exposing her vulnerable hidden side through clowning, she was able to become empowered.

Irving's use of failure, and consequent vulnerability, fits in with the clowning principles discussed in the literature review. Her failure to 'win the boy' (Irving, 2013, p.92) is the result of her failure to understand social rules around forming relationships. Her exaggerated feminine mask also signals a failure to understand societal expectations of women over forty. She forms connections with the audience by making them a part of her performance in order to clown she needs them to respond actively.

Despite this performance meeting the principles of clowning in its use of failure, otherness and audience connection it was not considered to be clowning by Irving's male teacher, Terry Enright. He told Irving that clowns could not be 'overtly sexual, but more androgynous' and so this explicit female persona 'was a comic character and therefore not [her] clown' (Irving, 2013, p.94). Irving (2013, p.15) recalls hearing similar comments 'by various men' who also told her that she was 'mad and that women cannot be clowns'. These comments link back to the idea that androgyny in the context of clowning has become synonymous with masculinity and that the

absolute other is a space occupied by characters. It is important to note that some of the criticism experienced by Irving is shared by the historical clowns discussed previously; this is telling of the attitudes still held towards female clowns, despite their rising numbers (Davison, p,2013)

Irving (2013, p.96) did attempt to appear more androgynous by her critic's standards: 'wearing attire that made me look less "feminine"' (figure 6). In this performance she appeared barefoot, wearing a 'red and white stripy T-shirt and black baggy trousers' and 'a cut-down bowler hat' (Irving, 2013, p.96). Irving's aesthetic is more like that of the traditional male clown. Instead of using explicit femininity to showcase her difference she uses traditional methods such as badly fitting clothing. Her aesthetic in this performance means that Irving's clown begins to occupy the space of the other that is also the same. The aesthetic does however appear less distinct from everyday society than the aesthetic used in her previous performance, wherein she occupied the space of the absolute other. As such, in this performance she relates less to the principles of clowning because her aesthetic does not distinguish her as the other from everyday society.

Figure 6: Maggie Irving performing *Brick in the Wall* in 2009 (Irving, 2013, p.96).

Aesthetically Irving removed her absolute, womanly, otherness but behaviourally 'the same naughty girl that tottered on high heels in [her] first solo clown performance appeared again' (Irving, 2013, p.96). During the performance Irving's finger acted as if it had a mind of its own, firstly getting stuck in her ear but later travelling to different areas of her body. She explains: 'the finger passed between my legs on the outside of my trousers but appearing to the audience to be hovering around the entrance to my vagina' (Irving, 2013, p.96). Making her aesthetic more like the traditional male clown did not change Irving's clown persona. Like Fratellini, she has an inner clown, however Irving's practice moves clowning into the space of the absolute other.

The type of androgyny Irving's tutors referred to was not that which allowed an individual to appear as '*both* masculine and feminine' (Bem, 1974, p.155; emphasis in original), but a version that 'denies the sexed body' (Irving, 2013, p.98). Irving views this as unhelpful, particularly for women, as it attempts to censor them and the stories they want to tell in their clowning. For her it did not matter how much she tried to adhere to androgyny or censor her femininity: 'I couldn't pretend that she wasn't there, so it did matter, and it came out in everything I did' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). Irving's use of 'she' here refers to the clowning persona from her first performance which reflected her personal experience of being a woman.

Although Irving acknowledges that some women clowns may wish to be genderless, which is perfectly fine for them, it is ultimately unhelpful to tell women that they *must* be genderless. The assertion that a clown can only occupy the space of the other that is also the same does not allow for freedom of expression, 'it narrows your options down' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). It puts clowning in a fixed position when people change continuously throughout their lives. This way of teaching does not give the space for that change to happen.

Irving discusses fixed identity within patriarchal clown pedagogy, such as that of Lecoq and Gaulier. During her own training with Gaulier, Irving once again found her use of explicit femininity being censored. When Gaulier assigned the class costumes he told Irving to dress as King Kong's wife. Irving's interpretation of this was 'the woman abducted in the film *King Kong*' (Irving, 2013, p.106). Her costume reflected what this woman would look like after living in the jungle with King Kong. It consisted

of a 'huge hairy muff, hairy armpits, kind of bananas under the breasts' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). This is similar to how Irving's inner clown had previously presented itself, in the form of grotesque exaggerated femininity. The other that is also the same is non-existent here, Irving is the absolute other and she makes no attempt to hide it.

Gaulier was specific in that Irving should dress as King Kong's wife, however upon seeing her his response was 'bad costume' (Irving, 2013, p.106). Irving spent the remaining three weeks of the course dressed as a Gorilla (figure 7). Gaulier did not explain why the costume was bad, but Irving suggests that 'he found it quite difficult to confront' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). Irving's explicitly gendered clown did not fit into Gaulier's pedagogy. However, when given the Gorilla costume Irving recalls that 'considering clown class is supposed to free you up, it was very un-liberating' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). This inhibited Irving's ability to clown:

> I could not transgress from socialised to unsocialised with this authoritarian clown teacher and felt unable to relax and let go or attain the relative status to become the grotesque and unruly inner clown (Irving, 2013, p.107)
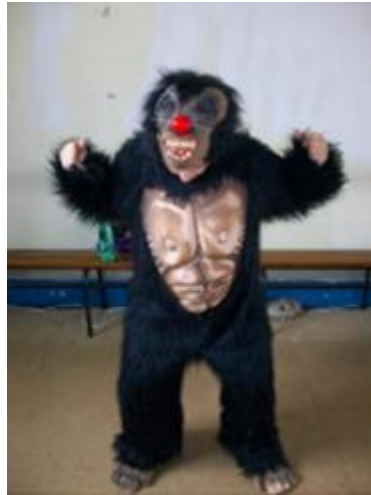
Figure 7: Maggie Irving as King Kong's wife (Irving, 2013, p.106).

Gaulier employs Lecoqian principles in his training, however he does so through the authoritarian method of via negative. The teacher dismisses what they see as inappropriate choices 'simply by saying 'no' to what the individual or student group has presented' (Irving, 2013, p.101). This can involve heavy criticism and berating of students in response to their performances. As such there is emphasis on pleasing the teacher so as not to receive this harsh feedback. Irving (personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020) does not see this as being useful, as it is not 'necessarily conducive to everybody', some people do not want to have to please the teacher; they want to freely play.

These traditional pedagogies are only concerned with the 'red nose simple clown' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). In Gaulier's class the red nose is integral to the clowning, it is a device that liberates the performer and allows them to enter the state of clown. Irving however, despite acknowledging its usefulness for some people in entering the state, does not see it as essential or

particularly liberating for a performer to require such a device to clown. It hinges one's ability to clown on having the device and entering one way of clowning, which is the simple clown.

The figure of the simple clown is aligned with the Lecoq style of clowning. Irving uses Wright to explain that this clown works from a 'personal point of bafflement' (Wright cited in Irving, 2013, p.64). This bafflement can be illustrated by a performer who 'walks onto the stage and does not quite know why they are there' (Wright cited in Irving, 2013, p,64). Their vulnerability and the relationship they create with an audience comes 'simply from being themselves' (Wright, 2013, p.64). This clown is an example of the other who is also the same because even though it is a figure that is distinct from society it appears in the same way. A personal point of bafflement can be presented in several ways, but it is still a personal point of bafflement. As this clown figure has been the basis for much of clown training, it is unsurprising that the space occupied by the other that is also the same has become synonymous with that occupied by the simple clown.

Some people, such as Irving, do not identify with this simple clown. Irving's inner clown knows why she is there, for example in her first clown performance she is searching for love. Therefore, they may not feel there is space for them in most clown classes which 'are coming from the Gaulier or Lecoq discipline' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). Irving's difficulty fitting in with these traditional classes is an example of her inherent absolute otherness.

Irving also does not view this traditional method as helpful for other women. She has built what she describes as a feminist clown practice which aims to write the 'female text/body into clown discourse' (Irving, 2013, p.16).

Irving (2013, p.28) proposes 'a clowning that is able to empower women through its engagement with myth, archetype and the transgression afforded by the grotesque body'. This harks back to Fratellini's practice of clowning wherein otherness is signalled by grotesqueness; however, Irving's grotesqueness comes from her femininity, not the traditional male clown mask. Irving's feminist clown practice does not totally disregard the Lecoq method of clowning. It 'engages with and reworks' these practices in a way that creates a new practice which is 'politically motivated [and] creates a framework for anybody to clown regardless of sexed body or gender' (Irving, 2013, p.29). She does not attempt to be the other that is also the same, but to employ some elements of traditional practice to develop a way of clowning that embraces the absolute other instead of separating them into the category of 'comic character' (Irving, 2013, p.94).

This practice does not limit clowning to being genderless, or by extension masculine. In her own use of the feminist clown practice Irving makes public the parts of the female experience that are not considered socially acceptable as a way of signalling absolute otherness.

A prime example of Irving's feminist clown practice is the persona she created while developing it: Sedusa. Sedusa is a reflection of the mythical Gorgon Medusa, who

after sleeping with or being raped by the God Poseidon, is transformed into a monster with snakes for hair and whose stare turns people to stone. Irving created the role of Sedusa to express her inner clown. She explains that the persona 'illustrates elements of the out of bounds hysteric and illustrates my engagement with the avant-garde and feminist theories' (Irving, 2013, p.190).

Aesthetically Irving (2013, p.189) aimed to create 'a spectacle of femininity' (figure 8). She wore 'pale makeup, darkened [her] eyes and reddened [her] lips, in order to suggest the face of death' (Irving, 2013, p.187). A key feature of her makeup was to blacken a mole on her cheek which symbolised syphilis and beauty, this 'signified freedom – both bodily and sexual' (Irving, 2013, p.187). The frightening nest of snakes which transformed Medusa's seductive feminine hair into a sign of danger was replaced with knitted and crocheted snakes that 'could be amusing as well as enticing' (Irving, 2013, p.185). Unlike Matthews or Adams, who created a spectacle of the singularity of female clowns, Irving's spectacle is of femininity itself for the purpose of clowning. Although she is explicitly feminine, her grotesqueness makes her distinct from societal ideals of femininity.

Irving (2013, p.187) wore a gold and silver sequined dress that 'not only aimed to epitomize the scales and patterning of a snake but also suggested a mirror' (figure 9). The dress was intentionally short, like the rest of her costume it drew people to look at her. For Irving this linked back to Medusa's story in that she was either raped or seduced; she connected this with debates regarding women's clothing and sexual assault. On her feet Irving wore steel toe capped Doc Marten boots and adopted a masculine gait when she walked. This was an act of defiance against her

socialisation. Irving (2013, p.189) explains that 'women's bodies continue to be policed and stepping into these boots allowed for a release of practiced behaviour' (2013, p.189). The clown mask Irving uses as Sedusa is one of grotesque, unsocialised, and explicit femininity

This presentation of femininity deviates from the socially acceptable. It is not 'weak' or 'passive' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p.359). It shows strength and control over the female body and its sexuality. This could be compared to Matthews' New Woman image; however, Irving has dictated everything herself. The aesthetic is still playful, such as with the snakes which appear as a caricature of the vicious ones that topped Medusa's head.

Figures 8: Maggie Irving's makeup when performing as Sedusa (Irving, 2013, p.186).

Figure 9: Maggie Irving's costume when performing as Sedusa (Irving, 2013, p.200).

Sedusa's behaviour also embodies grotesque, unsocialised and explicit femininity. Irving's interpretation of Medusa's story was political, and she wanted this to be reflected in her practice. Sedusa was a woman 'who has learnt to look and look back, aware of the inherent dangers in this act' (Irving, 2013 p.30). She is both a reflection and a subversion of Medusa. Irving had created a persona that was unafraid, who would tell strangers '" don't look at me… I kill you"' with a smile on her face (Irving, 2013, p.185).

Her behaviour as Sedusa functioned to undo socialised behaviour. Instead of being acceptably timid she was loud and grotesque. Irving even uses sexuality in this performance, such as through the name Sedusa, without being inherently sexual. Sexuality is tied to the concept of desire; however, Irving's sexuality does not serve this purpose; it is empowering and takes back ownership of that which she has been told must be kept under control. For example, in a business meeting as Sedusa, she would wiggle her bottom. This was not to be sexy, but to parody sexy behaviour. Irving (2013, p.1890) describes this as an act of mimesis which allowed women to become unsocialised and shed, if only for a moment, the need to behave'.

Irving's unsocialised, explicitly feminine, behaviour clearly signals her absolute otherness. It is also indicative of McManus' (2003) idea that clowns are not bound by rules. In Irving's case this is not because she is too stupid to understand them, but because she favours her own clown logic. This logic is that of the absolute other which Irving's practice embraces. At no point does Irving enter the space of the other

that is also the same; instead, she reorganises otherness by using explicit femininity to forge a connection with her audience. For example, in the business meeting when she encourages the other women to wiggle their bums with her. Irving plays in a different world to the traditional male clown and invites her audience into this new world where they also engage in absolute otherness. She explains that 'Sedusa mirrored Medusa, and became a mirror for others to mirror her, and they, in turn, became unruly Medusa themselves' (Irving, 2013, p.193). Effectively, Irving's absolute otherness as Medusa acts as a mirror for absolute otherness itself.

It is Irving's absolute otherness that aligns her clowning with the principles identified in this thesis. She shows a clear failure to adhere to social norms ascribed to women through her use of grotesque femininity and this is also a signifier of her absolute otherness. It is then through this absolute otherness that Irving is able to create a connection with her audience. Her clowning is meant for the audience that is the absolute other and she finds them by inviting them into the world of the absolute other to play with her

Irving's practice of rebelling against gender norms is also present in her teaching. She does not encourage students to be genderless, but rather guides them in a clown practice which deconstructs socialised behaviour and 'unpack[s] patriarchal systems' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). Irving asks her students to 'come and clown and do it differently. Be grotesque, be mad, be unsocialised. Because that's what feminist clown practice is' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). Knowingly or not, she is encouraging

students to engage in absolute otherness. As a part of this she also invites them to play with sexuality and not pretend to be innocent. Irving (personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020) explains that university students, tend to become shy around the topic of sex. She attempts to remove this shyness because sex is commonly a large part of the university experience, and thus a part of their lives. On these taboo topics, Irving (personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020) asks that her students 'don't pretend it's not there'.

In the discussion of her teaching Irving notes that a person's ability to undo socialised behaviour can be affected by the place in which they exist in society. She uses the example of age and that she has noticed younger women tend to struggle more with letting go. She believes that this may be due to the popularity of social media and the constant need to appear desirable. This echoes Fratellini's belief that women may not want to clown because they fear being considered ugly. This concurs with hook's (2000) writings on feminism wherein she considers the value placed on women's appearance historically. hooks (2000, p.35) also makes the point that 'girls today are often just as self-hating'. Irving's thoughts, in a way, also echo Fratellini's belief that women may not want to clown because they fear being considered ugly

 A feminist clown practice is not just limited to women or the undoing of social norms for an individual's own gender identity. Irving believes that 'as a clown you can really play with orders and challenge normality' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020). Irving does this by taking the clown out of the space occupied by

the other who is also the same, and into the space of the absolute other. She also repositions the concept of absolute otherness in her teaching by expanding its possibilities outside of only pertaining to women. Students can play with mixing up and flipping between genders which opens exciting new avenues of play. In turn this provides students with a 'more flexible range of gender expression' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020) where they can use gender in different ways and at different levels.

Irving's practice also brings about the opportunity for a gender fluid approach to clowning. This moves away from a heteronormative practice which only allows limited freedoms when performing gender in clowning. This approach to clowning is discussed at length in the next section of this thesis. It is interesting though that such a development has occurred within both Irving's and de Castro's practices.

Irving utilises the grotesque, unsocialised and explicit femininity that is a true reflection of her inner clown, and in doing so can be accurately categorised as the absolute other. She does not identify with the traditional male clown's otherness, and so reorganises otherness in order to find an audience that she can connect with in order to clown. She does this by bringing her audience into her clowning and into the space of the absolute other. If members of her audience do not respond she moves on to find members who will, as they are who her practice is for. As such Irving shows the clowning potential of absolute otherness and gender play. This allows women in particular to access an inner clown that is not imposed upon by gendered restrictions. There is then also a possibility that Irving's practice could encourage

more women to clown as they can do so in a way that actually reflects who they are, and not who a teacher wants them to be. At its core Irving's teaching of feminist clown practice is 'about people being who they want to be' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020).

Angela de Castro: A Gender Fluid Clown Practice

Angela de Castro is a Brazilian theatre clown, and teacher, currently based in London. As the literature review explained, this style of clown performance is 'much closer to the linear impetus of conventional theatre' (Peacock, 2009, p.26). It employs the use of a narrative throughout the performances, exploring plot and character motivation, and is often much longer than the type of clown act you would find in the circus. De Castro (cited in Carolin, 1998) also describes theatre clowns as being far more subtle in comparison to circus clowns. For example, their clothing is similar to that which you might see others wearing down the street, 'to indicate that the clown is aware of society's dress code', but with obvious enough 'transgressions from the norm' which mark them out as being different (Peacock, 2009, p.16). There is something that is just off as opposed to an overt signal of difference (figure 10).

What is most prevalent about de Castro's practice though is their use of gender fluidity. As a gender fluid person themselves de Castro is non-binary in terms of gender, however they are also non-binary in terms of otherness. As previously established, de Beauvoir uses the labels other who is also the same and absolute other in relation to men and women respectively. De Castro does not fit in to either of

these categories, thus they deviate from the heteronormative system of gender categorisation. In turn they also deviate from heteronormative clowning which is what this chapter will explore. Like Irving, de Castro is able to move away from the traditional practice of the other who is also the same and still be considered a clown as opposed to a character. However, de Castro takes this further, they do not attempt to connect with people through absolute otherness but instead relates to these concepts through a fluid otherness

Figure 10: Angela de Castro as one of their clown personas, Silva. (The Why Not Institute, 2020).

De Castro did not officially begin their clowning career until their late twenties, up to which point they had been an actor in Brazil and touring in various countries. In conversation with David Bridel, they recounted their difficulties with acting and their

tendency to clown, albeit unknowingly. They recall how the use of the fourth wall 'never felt right' and how they preferred 'small parts, parts that didn't speak very much' (Bridel, 2015, p.144). Over time the differences between them and other actors began to develop more, 'a few people go that way, so I go there. People go down, I go up', de Castro describes these qualities as having an 'elemental sense of clowning' (Bridel, 2015, p.144). Although de Castro now recognises what they were doing as clowning, they had no way of identifying it at the time.

According to de Castro, growing up in Brazil there was no theatre clowning. Even circus clowning was a hard thing to come by in terms of training. When de Castro did approach a circus school, they were told "we don't teach this, and by the way, you're too old" (Bridel, 2015, p.145). As there were also 'no books on clowning, no videos, no DVDs' (Bridel, 2015. P.145) de Castro sought out people who had been to Europe or knew anything about clowning to find out more. They opened their own company hoping to create more clowning, but this work only contained 'an element of clowning, but it was very circus like, too extravagant for me' (Bridel, 2015, p.145). It was not until a few years later in London, where de Castro signed up for a clowning workshop, that they found theatre clowning and could begin their own career.

De Castro's practice is built from Lecoq's idea of uncovering a person's 'hidden side' to reveal their 'inner clown' (Lecoq cited in Irving, 2013, p.88). They are also heavily influenced by teachers Pierre Byland and Philippe Gaulier, who they describe as 'two sides of the same coin' (Bridel, 2015, p.14). Gaulier's approach teaches discipline

and clarity, 'there is no bullshit' (Bridel, 2015, p.14), and Byland teaches the simplicity of clowning. They explain that Byland summarised the essence of what clowning is for them. It is not a technique that you can learn but a state: 'something you have to put yourself in. A different intelligence' (Bridel, 2015, p.148). The state is not fabricated, it is an expression of the performer's hidden side.

For de Castro this clown cannot just be created, it must be discovered, or inspired in some way. When a person tries to structure their clown 'that is a character you're creating' (Bridel, 2015, p.148). With a clown persona 'you don't know what's going to happen' (Bridel, 2015, p.148).

As previously mentioned, de Castro's fluid identity is a key feature of their clown practice. This manifests itself through de Castro's use of multiple clown personas. It should be noted that the majority of these personas are male, not because of a belief that the neutral image of the clown is masculine, but a belief that a clown persona comes from an individual's own identity. I took part in one of de Castro's training courses, 'How to be a Stupid' in London, in January 2020, where they spoke about the connection between themselves and their personas. De Castro explained that although they are comfortable being of female sex, and have no desire to transition, they identify as being more masculine on the inside ('How to be a Stupid' course. London, January 2020).

As outlined by Gosling (2018, p.76) de Castro does 'not feel confined by restrictive gender boundaries'. Their gender expression is based on how they feel in a certain

situation or at a certain time. Considering this in the context of de Beauvoir's concept of otherness de Castro presents themselves as something else entirely. Although they feel more connected with masculinity, they are happy to remain sexually female meaning they unsettle the binary otherness and make it fluid. They can clown as the more traditional male other who is also the same, the female absolute other or as something else entirely. The variety present in de Castro's clowning is best demonstrated by their personas, for example Souza and the fat ballerina.

Souza is a male persona; he wears a badly fitting suit with an oversized jacket and corsage and trousers that are too short (figure 11). His makeup draws attention to the centre of his face, with dark raised eyebrows, reddened but not overdrawn lips and a large flesh coloured nose (figure 12). Souza can be labelled a theatre clown as his aesthetic does show an otherness from societal norms but not in an overt or grotesque way which one might expect of a circus clown. The costume also functions to disguise de Castro's female body, making them appear more masculine. Souza's aesthetic is very much like the other who is also the same. There is nothing overly explicit in terms of gender, in a way Souza appears to have a very "neutral" male form. His aesthetic otherness comes very simply from having ill-fitting clothes and some enhanced facial features.

Figures 11: Angela de Castro's makeup when performing as Souza in *The Gift* (Contemporary Clowning Projects, n.d).

Figure 12: Angela de Castro's costume when performing as Souza in *The Gift* (Contemporary Clowning Projects, n.d).

The fat ballerina is a female persona whose costume is a simple tutu. However, her most important aesthetic feature is her fatness as this is the source of her otherness. Dancers often experience 'heightened pressure to maintain a lean bodily physique' (Swami & Harris, 2012, p.40). This increases for dance types such as ballet which 'require individuals to attain excessively slender physiques' (Swami & Harris, 2012, p.41). As a result, the fat dancer does not fit in with her peers, she fails to adhere to these pressures. The fat ballerina also makes no attempt to hide her fatness, she is comfortable with how she looks. McManus (2003) explains that the clown's failure to adhere to social norms can come from an ability to make their own rules using their clown logic. The fat ballerina does this as she is satisfied in her clown logic that her body is fine, even if it is different to a typical ballet dancer. De Castro's use of explicit femininity and otherness relating to an issue that is viewed as being very feminine, that is the societal pressure to adhere to bodily standards, make the fat ballerina the absolute other.

In having clown personas of different genders, de Castro's clowning is gender fluid. They are not bound either by the gender they most relate to, or the one they were assigned at birth. As such even though both personas can individually be placed within de Beauvoir's categorisations of otherness de Castro's clown practice as a whole does not fit into either one. One way to describe this would be that just as their gender is fluid so is their otherness.

These personas also serve to explain how de Castro finds their clown personas. As previously mentioned, they do not plan how their personas will be, they just let them be. Souza, for example, appeared when de Castro experienced cultural differences after moving to the UK which inspired them to write a show, *The Gift.* De Castro describes Brazilian people as very romantic; they recall that when someone felt ready to make a relationship serious, they would ask their partner '"will you marry me?"' (Bridel, 2015, p.150). When de Castro did this in the UK though, their potential girlfriend found it too intense and was scared away. De Castro explains 'I could never be me […] I was too much. I was over the top' (Bridel, 2015, p.250). Souza is a heavy romantic who comes to say that 'to be romantic is okay. To be metaphysical, to be poetic, to be philosophical is all right' (Bridel, 2015, p.150). He is the hidden romantic side of de Castro that is other to the UK's societal norms.

Souza's romantic nature is a sign of his failure to understand certain cultural aspects of the country in which he resides, directly reflecting de Castro's own experience. This makes him, as it makes everyone in love, vulnerable to rejection, possible

embarrassment and even the loss of a potential partner. Despite the vulnerability in his position, Souza does not hide his romantic side, and he is undeterred by his obvious difference to others. Unlike de Castro, who did not feel they could be themselves, Souza is free to be his complete self.

Souza also reflects another of de Castro's hidden sides. He is a male persona, and in *The Gift,* he is attracted to a woman. De Castro is a lesbian who heavily identifies with masculinity. They describe this as their 'butch identity' (de Castro cited in Carolin, 1998, p.225). In Brazil they did not feel accepted as this and describe having 'to compromise all the time' (de Castro cited in Carolin, 1998, p.225). During the clown course de Castro spoke about going to work as a 'straight woman' then visiting hidden lesbian bars at night ('How to be a Stupid' course. London, January 2020). In Brazil de Castro could be openly romantic, but not as a butch person that was attracted to women. In Britain they felt more accepted as a lesbian but could not be so openly romantic. De Castro has had to slip fluidly between these parts of themselves depending on where they are. Souza however is free to do all of these things at the same time wherever he finds himself.

The fat ballerina also has personal meaning to de Castro. She was inspired by de Castro's affinity with Disney's *Fantasia* and graceful dancing, and the simple fact that de Castro 'used to be very fat' (Bridel, 2015, p.150). Like most women, as previously explored, de Castro also experienced pressures to look a certain way. This pressure is increased for a person involved in a dance style such as ballet. As a fat person de Castro would not be accepted within the ranks of these graceful dancers. De

Castro's ballerina is free to dance and to be fat, just as Souza says that it is okay to be romantic, the ballerina says, 'to be fat is fine' (Bridel, 2015, p.150).

Like Souza, the fat ballerina reflects de Castro's gender fluidity, and their difference from heteronormative society and categories of otherness. De Castro does feel more in touch with their masculine side; however, they still view themselves as biologically female. Having this butch identity does not prevent de Castro from going through female experiences which is what the fat ballerina represents. Issues and 'anxiety about appearance and negative body image are "normative" among women globally' (Swami & Harris, 2012, p.40). It makes sense then that this fat biological female would express this experience with a feminine mask.

On the creation of their clown personas, de Castro says 'it just comes to me. I give space to them' (Bridel, 2015, p.150). For clarification, "it" here refers to the clown persona. This also means that there is not a time frame that can be applied to the formation of these personas. Some of their personas are fully formed within weeks, others take years. It is not enough to have the basis of a persona; de Castro needs to give the persona space to exist and find out who they are. This space comes in different ways:

> I sweep the floor for hours and see what happens. I walk, I walk, I walk. Miles. For years. You know, just walking with the guy and writing to him. He writes back. The ideas come like this. And then I have a go. If it sticks, it's a good idea. (Bridel, 2015, pp.151-152).

De Castro's clowns have the freedom to develop however they choose, there are not prescribed rules or guidelines that they must follow. These clown personas are also changeable depending on the context in which they exist. De Castro (cited in Carolin, 1998, p.255) uses aging as an example: "'As I become mature, so does Souza'". As de Castro ages their personality and life experiences change. They, like everybody else, needs time to come to terms with these changes. Because Souza reflects de Castro, he also needs space to "digest his age" (de Castro cited in Carolin, 1998, p.225). De Castro (cited in Carolin, 1998, p.225) describes Souza as having become more confident with age and having "'new issues to worry about'". These new issues are not specified by de Castro, but it can be assumed that they relate to Souza's identity as a romantic and how looking for romance changes as a person gets older. This in turn affects how Souza behaves in shows such as *The Gift.*

This method of creating a clown persona shows even more so the fluidity of de Castro's clowning. There are no boundaries or binaries they feel obligated to adhere to. De Castro's clowning not only changes based on the fluidity of their gender identity but on how they experience life. This unsettles both the binary of gender and the binary of otherness observed by de Beauvoir. As such de Castro's clown personas are perceived as having a fluid otherness through their fluid relationship with the heteronormative binary.

Personal identity is also integral to de Castro's training courses. When building clown costumes during the training I attended, this concept was heavily emphasized. There

was not time to wait for everyone's clown to reveal itself, so de Castro facilitated a sort of guided meditation in which we visualised a place where we felt the most safe, happy, free, and beautiful. This place was the participant's land of Why Not. After the guided meditation we drew ourselves in this place. We could take any form, whether that was a person, animal, object, or organic matter. The drawing of ourselves within our land of Why Not formed the basis for our clown's costume and the identity they presented to the world.

Whilst trying on different costumes we discussed the topic of gender presentation in relation to one of the male participants. He had visualised himself as a long black line. His costume needed to reflect this and so he was looking for items that would lengthen his body. At first, he tried tight black trousers and leggings to accentuate his slim build and make him appear longer and straighter, however they did not feel quite right. This was a problem with every variation of trouser he tried. While looking for more pieces of costume he found a long, black, tightfitting dress and put that over the tight black trousers; it was perfect. I asked him how he felt about wearing the dress, and if that affected the gender of his clown. He told me that he saw his clown as male, but the trousers did not feel like the right way to express his clown persona. His clown felt more comfortable and more like themselves in the dress. De Castro agreed that the dress was best, and at no point did it come into question that he may be parodying femininity or that his clown identified as female. The dress was simply the best reflection of the area of this participant's identity that his clown persona was expressing.

This style is similar to Irving's, whose feminist clown practice is 'about people being who they want to be' (Irving, personal interview by Zoom, 23 November 2020) and then, as previously discussed, using the resulting absolute otherness to connect with an audience. De Castro takes things further though. They do not instruct students to play with gender like Irving does, the students simply have the freedom to do so. Everything is fluid and completely up to the student to figure out through their persona. This male participant with his masculine identifying persona who uses a more feminine aesthetic, like de Castro, has a fluid relationship with otherness.

Like Irving's practice, de Castro's method of training is very different to master teachers such as Gaulier. Although both de Castro's and Gaulier's training come from Lecoqian principles, de Castro's identity-based pedagogy comes across as less restrictive than Gaulier's use of via negative. A clear comparison here is the heavy criticism Irving received for her original King Kong's wife costume that resulted in any explicit gender being removed from it, and de Castro's encouragement of the male student who wanted to wear feminine clothing.

The freedom de Castro gave to our clown personas also extended to their behaviour. De Castro's only rule was that clowns live in the moment. This means the clown's otherness can change from moment to moment, further evidencing the fluidity of this practice.

During an exercise titled "Variety Show", performers were instructed to enter the space and perform something in the state of clown. They had the option to repeat

the performance in the same way, or differently, and could leave and come on again to receive more praise from the audience. When I did this exercise, I bowed after performing, and de Castro pointed out to my persona that the audience could see her breasts. I came out of the state for a moment thinking I should cover them and used the bag which was part of my costume to cover my chest when bowing.

Afterwards de Castro explained that by leaving the state and covering my breasts in this way, I was thinking too much which meant I had missed an opportunity for clowning. Had I remained in the state and lived in the moment I might have looked to the audience, down my shirt at my breasts, stood straight and covered them, then bowed again with them covered but spread my arms during the bow to take in all the audience's praise, thereby revealing my breasts again. This was just one possibility though and my clown could just have easily made a point masking her breasts throughout another round of her performance. Neither would have been incorrect as for de Castro there is no one correct way for the clown to respond, as long as it is the clown's response. What was key was that I remained in the state and allowed my clown to explore these opportunities using their own clown logic.

By exposing my breasts my persona became explicitly female. However, unlike Irving or Adams, this was not intentional. Up to this point I had not considered my persona's gender, as I had wanted this to come out through play. Even up to this point in the exercise I had not behaved in an explicitly gendered way, it was this single act that made my clown feminine. In other exercises though my persona would act in a more domineering, stereotypically masculine, way. Through the

course my persona presented itself in several ways relating to gender depending on how my persona responded to each activity. As such, even if I occupied the space of the absolute other on this occasion, this was a result of my clown exploring its fluidity.

De Castro speaks relatively little about their experience specifically as a female who clowns. They have however recounted experiences where they have been expected to behave a certain way because of their sex and perceived gender. Whilst touring with Slava Polunin's *Snow Show*, de Castro worked in what they (cited in Carolin, 1998, p.225) describe as a male dominated, "chauvinist" environment. They explain: '"The technician will not let me hold a tool because that is not 'a woman's job.' I can't sew but I'm good with a hammer, and for them, that's hard to understand"' (de Castro cited in Carolin, 1998, p.225). This is evidence that in normal life, despite their fluid identity, de Castro is still perceived as the absolute other.

De Castro (cited in Carolin, 1998, p.225) says that it was their 'ability to compromise and "find a balance"' which helped them deal with these situations. As discussed, de Castro has needed to adapt several times over their life and career in order to accommodate changes. As both a performer and a person they are never fixed.

A gender fluid clown practice better aligns a performer with clowning principles. Societal gender norms are based on 'culturally determined expectations of women and men' (Gosling, 2018, p.76). They come from a binary, which is also the basis for de Beauvoir's heteronormative categorisations of otherness. Social norms dictate

that a person presents as and behaves within in *one* of these categories. In having the ability to move between them the gender fluid clown clearly signals their difference from heteronormative society and its expectations.

This demonstrates a failure to adhere to social norms, either out of misunderstanding or through the choice to disregard these norms in favour of clown logic. Operating outside of the established gender binary could also open the clown up to ridicule from heteronormative society and to a sense of vulnerability. This is also what makes this clown relatable though. In modern society it is relatively easy to find oneself operating outside of gender stereotypes and roles. A man can easily buy clothing in traditionally feminine colours or patterns. If this man walks into a room of other men wearing traditional male patterns and colours, he may feel a sense of absolute otherness. Vice versa, a woman may now find herself working in an industry where all her colleagues are male. By virtue of being a woman she may already be perceived as the absolute other, but in this situation that feeling is heightened. The gender fluid clown brings these feelings into the spotlight for the audience's entertainment.

De Castro's clowning is indicative of how the use of gender within clown practice has developed. Like Irving, they unsettle de Beauvoir's categories of the other who is also the same and the absolute other. De Castro takes this in a different direction though. Irving embraces absolute otherness and through the unsocialised acts of explicit femininity, forms a new kind of audience connection in a new space of play. De Castro is able to slip fluidly between the spaces of the other that is also the same

and the absolute other through the use of multiple clown personas. This expands the possibilities of otherness beyond the heteronormative binary. As a result, they make clowning more accessible to performers who do not identify with the traditional, so-called neutral clown figure, that is someone who is not a cis-gender, straight white man.

It is important to acknowledge that de Castro's gender fluidity in their clowning is directly linked to their own identity, and this really is the cornerstone of what their practice is. During my training with de Castro, they explained that each person's clown behaves in a way that is suitable for them, 'no one can say a person's clown is wrong, because it is right for them' (de Castro, teaching comments. 'How to be a Stupid' course. London, January 2020). The kind of clowning de Castro practices and teaches is not fixed and allows the persona, or hidden clown, to respond in ways that consider the ever-changing nature of an individual. It is a fluid otherness that can change at any time born out of the identity of whoever is performing. In this practice no two clowns will be other in the same way because no two performers, of any gender, have the same identity.

Conclusion: An Exploration of Clowning and Gender

 In this thesis the use of gender within clown practice has been linked to de
Beauvoir's gendered categorisations of otherness. De Beauvoir points out that in
society there has historically been a 'universal predominance of males (de Beauvoir,
1972, p.74). As the dominant group, men are a kind of invisible norm within society.
As a result, she describes them as the other that is also the same. This links to
clown practice as in literature they are often referred to using the pronoun 'he'
instead of 'them', which is also indicative of this universal predominance of males.
Despite being described as androgynous or neutral, the clown figure has become
synonymous with masculinity. As such when applying de Beauvoir's concept of
otherness this neutral clown figure occupies the space of the other who is also the
same.

Women are described by de Beauvoir as the absolute other. Although they are the
same as men in that they are people, women do not hold the same position in
society. They are considered as a separate group. This has also been true for
women in clowning. As authors such as Kerman have pointed out in their description
of clown types, 'explicitly female clowns' are considered more as characters who are
playing the role of a clown. This means then that the explicitly female clown is
separate and occupies the space of the absolute other.

What this thesis has shown through the analysis of gender-based clown practice is
that there have been major developments which serve to unsettle this binary

otherness. Historically it was the singularity of female clowns which allowed them to perform in the circus. They were a spectacle used by circus owners as a marketing tool to increase ticket sales.

An example of this is Evetta Matthews, the New Woman Clown. She attempted to occupy the space of the other that is also the same through the usurping of masculine prerogatives, such as her threatening independence. However, it was this image that prevented her from being considered a clown. The New Woman was a symbol of success and empowerment. As a result, she was unable to fail and so could not abide by the principles of clowning. Matthews was unable to shed this image though. Her male bosses demanded that this was how she appeared, and she was dependent upon them for employment. This means that Matthews, and others like her, occupied the space of the absolute other and so can only be considered as character clowns.

Moving into the late twentieth century there was a turning point in the form of French circus clown, Annie Fratellini. She had been deterred from clowning by her father who told her that it was not a thing women could do. Later in life she was able to successfully occupy the space of the other that is also the same. In order to do this Fratellini masked her femininity with a traditional male clown mask, which she considered to be inherited from her clown ancestors. Her description of this shows that she did not feel as though she was disguising herself but revealing a hidden self. As such Fratellini did not play the role of a clown but transformed into one. The concept of a hidden self also relates to Lecoqian principles adopted by the majority

of clown training today. Fratellini's progressiveness is also evidenced by her providing opportunities for other women to clown with her circus school that anybody could attend.

Most of the developments in gender-based clown practice can be seen in a contemporary context. Maggie Irving has created a feminist clown practice wherein she embraces absolute otherness through unsocialised acts of explicit, grotesque femininity. This is not a character that Irving is playing but a reflection of her hidden self that has broken free of socially acceptable femininity. In her performances Irving encourages her audience to become unsocialised and explicit as well. Those who do not join her are not the audience she is looking for. Irving forms a new kind of audience connection in clowning wherein the audience also act in an unsocialised way and join her in the space occupied by the absolute other. In doing so she unsettles the categorisation of otherness by finding these new ways of clowning, such as through audience participation, within the space occupied by the absolute other.

A further development is Angela de Castro's gender fluid clown practice. As a gender fluid person de Castro has multiple clown personas which all reflect a different, hidden side. As such these personas also identify as different genders. Because of this de Castro cannot be simply categorised as occupying the space of either the other who is also the same or the absolute other. They are able to move fluidly between them. In doing so de Castro's practice deconstructs the binary of both gender and de Beauvoir's categorisations of otherness. Otherness in this

practice is guided by the hidden side of the performer. It is an otherness that is entirely changeable from moment to moment, a fluid otherness.

De Castro's clown practice shares aspects with Bem's definition of androgyny, which describes an individual that is '*both* masculine and feminine' (Bem, 1974, p.155). This term, androgyny, has also been used by clown authors to describe how clowns should appear. As previously explained though, the term has become somewhat obsolete in clowning due to its association with masculinity.

There is evidence however, in a practice such as de Castro's, that there is still potential for this term to be applied to clowning if it is used correctly. The use of androgyny shows the potential of gender fluid clown practice. In embracing explicit femininity and destabilising de Beauvoir's binary of otherness, this practice opens up more options to explore different experiences of failure and establish new forms of audience connection in contemporary clowning. As a result, a gender fluid clown practice has the potential to encourage not just more women into clowning, but people of all gender identities outside the dominant group of cis-gendered, straight, white men.

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