

Time: W 3-5  
Location: Glen Morris Studio and DC Seminar

Office: UC 356  
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**Course Description:**

Robert Armin made a vocation of impersonating fools and madmen. In fact, he took particular interest in studying the behavior of village idiots and fools retained on knights' estates and, in 1600, published *Foole Upon Foole*, a pamphlet combining eyewitness accounts with popular lore to form a catalogue of real and fictive fools. [Today, critics and theatre historians remember Armin as the actor for whom Shakespeare wrote, among others, the role of the Gravedigger in *Hamlet*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and the nameless Fool in *King Lear*.]

A strictly scholarly approach to Armin's work might investigate his writings about actual fools and what we know about his style of imitating them (his subtle impersonations, his skill as a ventriloquist, his dryly moralizing wit), but these scholarly findings can equally be used to open up broader, performative questions: about the coherence of performed identity, madness's subversive, decentralizing potential, and finally the fundamental features that connect acting to disorder (the former understood as artistic practice, the latter as a social and/or neurological condition).

While the course will include traditional seminar sessions on scholarly topics, such as historical research on Renaissance interpretations of folly, as well as Armin's own Stanislavski style method of imitating madness, visiting lecturers from the Faculty of Medical Science will address clinical perspectives, at the same time students will use the tools of performance to pursue independent research topics in a studio setting.

**Course Requirements**

- Participation in all studio and table sessions
- Final paper (10-20 pp) summarizing findings in the context of the question: what is performance research?

**Course Outline**

**N.B.** In place of weekly topics, I have formulated 6 modules which will guide our work throughout the term. I'm not going to set up a chronology now because, as we proceed, we will have to decide how long we want to spend on each module, whether, in light of new research, we want to return to a previous topic, or, according to what we have discovered, it is advisable to combine modules, the better to understand the interconnected nature and implications of the material.

Each week you will receive an assignment: things to read and/or a performance to prepare. All performance assignments will be supplemented with questions to guide both your rehearsal process and in-studio discussions.

Table sessions will be scheduled as necessary or desirable. For instance, when we enter the module on Method Acting and Munchausen Syndrome, we will be joined by a doctoral candidate in Psychology, who will present her research on Munchausen patients. Faculty from Psychology, Neurology, Mental Health and Addiction, as well as Disability Studies, will be invited to speak on relevant topics (potentially including autism, schizophrenia, Asperger Syndrome) as our group arrives at a more concrete sense of individual as well as collective research interests.

Please take time now to read through the modules and give some thought to what interests you the most and how your own preoccupations intersect or overlap with the topics plotted out here. In the next month, I will meet with individual members of the group to discuss your respective interests and devise relevant reading lists and research exercises. In the course of the term, each member will be asked to guide the group in a performance task or exercise that grows out of her or his specific focus. We will integrate contemporary North American texts into the reading list according to your interests and recommendations.

We will have 2 public showings of our work: the first in the context of F.O.O.T., the second at end of term.

# MODULES

## 1. MAD DISCOURSE

Does madness have its own language or does it speak by disrupting logical trains of thought and expression? Is the speaker a self? Or does madness speak through the fracturing of coherent identities? Is reason opposed to or complicit with nonsense? Is it possible to identify distinguishing characteristics of mad speech? According to clinical models? Aesthetic or theatrical ones?

Texts: Armin, *Quips Upon Questions*  
Shakespeare, *12 Night*  
Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* (selections) [<http://oll.libertyfund.org/ToC/0136.php>]  
Freud, "The Psychotic Doctor Schreber"

## 2. OBJECT RELATIONS

What kind of relationship to objects does madness entail? Does the meaning and/or function of objects undergo significant change? How can a non-utilitarian relationship to objects be explored on stage? In terms of both poetic density and destructive potential?

Texts: Armin, *Foole upon Foole*  
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*  
Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure"

## 3. MAD SPACE

Renaissance fools have an idiosyncratic manner of crossing or confusing spatial boundaries, in the social space of villages, estates, cities, or courts. Armin's fools, for instance, emerge entangled with a concrete sense of place, visible in their attachment to doorways, kitchens, moats. Does madness motivate a different kind of relationship to space? How does the presence of a mad character decenter dominant spatial organizations, whether regal or domestic? How, in a performance context, can we investigate the space between or at the margins of a given play world?

Texts: Armin, *Foole upon Foole*  
Shakespeare, *King Lear*  
De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* (selections)

## 4. METHOD ACTING AND MUNCHAUSEN SYNDROME

How and why do individuals imitate clinical disorders? What makes an imitation of madness persuasive? Verisimilar? How does feigned madness challenge diagnostic tools? How does it test audience expectations?

Texts: Armin, *Two Maides of Moreclack* (selected scenes)  
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*  
Von Trier, *Idiots*  
Stanislawski, *An Actor Prepares* (selections)

## 5. ANTI-SOCIALITY

According to Peter Sloterdijk, the Greek philosopher Diogenes favored a manner of argumentation that defied rational response. He picked his nose when Socrates conjured the oracle to speak about divine soul. He reacted to Plato's doctrine of Ideas by farting and masturbates in order to mock Plato's theory of love. How does mad behavior disrupt social norms and rules? What is the subversive value of idiocy? The power of behavior that does not lend itself to analysis? Unlike the Freudian slip that supposedly illuminates the unconscious, how do anti-social actions create an obstacle to meaning. What role can they play in performance?

Texts: Armin, *Foole upon Foole*  
Shakespeare, *The Tempest*  
Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*

## 6. NON-PRODUCTIVITY

What kind of challenge does madness pose to the assumptions of capitalism? How does disorder resist the means-and-end logic of productivity? Is the mad artist a useful cliché? How does the romance of non-productivity differ from the reality? Can both be represented on stage? To what ends?

Texts: Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*  
Foucault, "Madness, the Absence of Work"  
Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism, and Schizophrenia* (selections)