Forays into *Grammelot*: The Language of Nonsense

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> "Oi! Che fame! [. . .]
> bloup, bloup, bloup, ou, bloup!"
> — Dario Fo, *The Starving Zanni*, videotaped performance[1]

> *Grammelot* is a term of French origin, coined by Commedia players, and the word itself is devoid of meaning. It refers to a babel of sounds which, nonetheless, manage to convey the sense of a speech. *Grammelot* indicates the onomatopoeic flow of a speech, articulated without rhyme or reason, but capable of transmitting, with the aid of particular gestures, rhythms and sounds, an entire, rounded speech.
> — Dario Fo, *The Tricks of the Trade*[2]

In *The Tricks of the Trade*, the Italian playwright, performer, and winner of the 1997 Nobel Prize for Literature, Dario Fo, refers to the technique of *grammelot* which he often utilizes within performance. He defines *grammelot* as "a method of producing the semblance of a given language without adopting real or identifiable words from that language."[3] At first it seems overcomplicated to introduce a separate term for what simply means gibberish, or "unintelligible or meaningless language."[4] However, whereas *grammelot* is the production of meaning through imaginary language, gibberish can be understood as the obscuring of meaning through unintelligible sound-production. The difference between *grammelot* and gibberish is more profound still in terms of performance. Gibberish remains the same, independent of its context, whereas *grammelot*, is performance, or context, dependent. In other words, since *grammelot* must be meaningful to its onlooking audience, it is shaped and created with each specific audience in mind.

Though the term *grammelot*[5] has received some recent scholarly attention thanks to Fo's popularity, these investigations have not focused on the origin of the term, its etymology, or its applications historically to various performance

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practices. Therefore, since *grammelot* has been hitherto only partially recognized as a technique with historic roots, and since there have been no full explorations of the term and its existence in history, in this article, I would like to re-contextualize the term, building on the work Dario Fo began, in order to focus on the ways the etymology of *grammelot* reflects a variety of meanings and nuances that are apparent in performance.

Grammelot as an Historic Practice

Fo's contribution to our understanding of *grammelot* is immense. In fact, it is arguably due to Fo that *grammelot* has entered theatre discourse at all.[6] But, when approaching research of the term, Fo does not mention his own forerunners who experimented with the theatre technique, nor does he give himself to the less theatrical, more tedious task of resurrecting the origin of the term from contemporary and more dusty dictionaries. Interestingly, the few researchers who also mention *grammelot* in their work, taking their cues from Fo, tend to focus either on the practice as revealed in his work particularly, or, if they focus on *grammelot* as a theatre technique, they pay less attention to the actual derivation of the practice, and the origin of the term, instead, speculating as to why this practice was in use.[7] But in order to understand the long-lived art of performing the imaginary language called *grammelot*, we must first mention the artists who have incorporated the practice before Fo.

As John Rudlin has pointed out in his work on commedia dell'arte, *grammelot* may have first come to Fo's attention through the work of other twentieth-century performers, primarily Jacques Copeau and his Vieux Colombier theatre in France, which also incorporated this style of performance into their work.[8] In fact, it was the Vieux Colombier school which first consciously used the term *grummelotage* for their training exercise of evolving an "invented mimed language."[9] Whereas these twentieth-century forerunners used this imaginary language as a technique and practice for generating universal communication, Fo incorporated it for comic purposes, something that is more in keeping with the sixteenth-century acting technique from which he claims to have borrowed *grammelot*.

Indeed, before Copeau, invented language had made its appearance on stage and was an important feature in performances by the commedia dell'arte troupes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fo himself attributes the appellation *grammelot* to the seventeenth-century commedia performers working in France, the implication being that since the performers and audience members spoke different languages (Italian and French), *grammelot* facilitated a performance which may otherwise have been hampered by the fact that audience and player spoke using different idioms. Though the scenarios of commedia dell'arte (such as those found in the important Flaminio Scala Collection [1611] and in manuscripts preserved from the seventeenth-century Italian performer Domenico Biancolelli)[10]

suggest incorporating nonsense communication within *lazzi* (comic routines) and scenes was a common practice, nowhere in these materials is the word *grammelot* specifically used. However, since we know from contemporary accounts that these performers used incoherent verbal articulation, mis-spoken dialects and nonsequitors, we are, to an extent, able to remark on the practice of *grammelot* within this historic period.[11] So the question remains: whence does the term *grammelot* emerge?

Fo claims a link to history but never discloses why he chose *grammelot* to name that technique. Copeau uses a similar root in the form of *grummelotage*, but what is the connection between the appellation and the practice? How does the context determine the performance of the practice? In the following sections, I will demonstrate how *grammelot* shifts to the different performance contexts with which it has historically been associated. I will note how the different performances shape the technique differently, making *grammelot* either imaginary language, obscured language, an emotive expression, articulation of complaint, or mimetic expression.

Shall we Play?
Grammelot as Game

One of the most obvious features of *grammelot* is the fact that it is imaginary — having no existence outside of the temporal frame of the performance; it is a communication invented for a given group which is assembled for a limited time. As such, *grammelot* cannot be didactic, as it does not teach its lingual code for post-performance use. Rather, the *grammelot* will have a freeing or liberating effect by its ability to create a space for communication which relies little on accepted communicative linguistic codes outside the performance framework. In other words, one of the chief pleasures of *grammelot* is its apparent discontinuity from life , as it is experienced outside of the theatre. And one reason this separate nature is evident is that *grammelot* realizes a fantasy: it "imagines" language.

Imaginary language is something familiar to us from children, whose use of invented sounds allows them to create a personal coded communication.[12] In performance, the use of these sounds must communicate and be meaningful for the audience, while freeing, and at the same time challenging the actor to "let loose his imagination," externalizing it through this coded communication. (His listeners are sure to be much less attentive and forgiving than the parents of a child babbling his first sentences to ecstatic listening ears.) So, the actor must construct his imaginary language in a meaningful and communicative way. As Dario Fo lays it out, the story told through imaginary language must be created with certain rules in mind:

> To perform a narrative in *grammelot*, it is of decisive importance
> to have at your disposal a repertoire of the most familiar tonal
> and sound stereotypes of a language, and to establish clearly
> the rhythms and cadences of the language to which you wish to

refer [. . .] First and foremost, it is important to inform the audience
of the subject that will be discussed, as I have just done, then it
is vital to elaborate through sounds and gestures. . . [13]

These rules having been accomplished, it is hoped that with a skillful execution,
the actor will use the invented sounds to conjure up words that will be discernible
by his or her audience; in this way, his imaginary words and their acceptance by
the audience will have created a language particular to that moment in time and
space.

The ability to create these imagined languages is evident in performance
and in practices that are expressive and theatrical, such as party games. Though the
dictionary definition now available in the Italian dictionary *Zingarelli* suggests the
etymology of *grammelot* is uncertain, the *Dictionnaire de la langue française du
seizième siècle* offers more evidence that the word *grammelot* was used in this
period and for similar ends to those noted above. Though there was no entry for the
word *grammelot* in this dictionary, I found the word *grammellotte*,[14] whose definition
is closely associated with performativity.[15] The original source where the word is
mentioned is *La navigation du compaignon à la bouteille, avec le discourse des
ars et sciences de Maistre Hambrelin* in which a discussion of arts and sciences
includes the practice of *grammellotte*.[16] Possibly a forerunner to present day
"charades," *grammellotte* is described as a game of imaginary words (*motes
imaginaires*); this game, etymologically linked to *grammelot* by the root *grammel,*
may constitute the first proof of Fo's claim *grammelot* (the performance technique)
emerges in France.

Grammelot and the Imaginary

Fo himself connects the performance of invented sounds emulating
language to a much earlier source than *grammellotte*. The inspired monologue,
which was composed of *grammelots*, he claims, derives from practices of medieval
itinerant performers who exhibited their creative ability to conjure and improvise in
exchange for pay.[17] In his manual for performers, *manuale minimo dell'attore*
(1987), translated by Joe Farrell as *The Tricks of the Trade* (1991), Fo describes the
monologue of *The Starving Zanni*[18] as a contemporary version of what in medieval
Europe was an itinerant performer's stock in trade: comic monologues performed
seemingly impromptu for various crowds gathered (and paying) to watch. Since the
jongleurs were generally impoverished, their subject of performance frequently
involved hunger. The character of the *zanni,* whose name is derived from the
dialect form of Giovanni, a common Northern Italian name, performed a similar
function in the Renaissance as the medieval *jongleur.* Through the commedia
dell'arte troupes, prevalent in Italy, this Zanni was often incorporated within
performances as a staple character type. Among the Zanni's main performance

techniques was *grammelot*. And it is another interesting etymological discovery that the *grande dizionario enciclopedico* mentions *grumello* to be the name of an Italian locality (the region from which the Zanni emerges). "Grumello is a name of a certain Italian locality . . . a community of Lombardia . . . in the province of Cremona."[19] The dictionary identifies this area as located in Cremona and also mentions a mountain in this Lombardian area, in the province of Bergamo.[20] This area can be found on a map where it is noted as "Grumello dei Zanchi." Since Harlequin, the Zanni with whom *grammelot* is often associated, comes from Bergamo, there is a striking coincidence in the fact that in Bergamo there is an area called Grumello. Perhaps the technique of *grammelot* is named for the geographical region from which the originators of *grammelot* came.[21]

In *The Starving Zanni* Fo acts the part of a Northern Zanni who is so hungry that in describing his state, he imagines himself eating parts of his own body, imaginary food, even members of the audience. In addition to miming the various actions, the actor simultaneously verbalizes sounds, but hardly uses discernible words in order to constitute the pretended food item. Fo describes the scene as follows:

> I'm starving. Never been so hungry . . . oh God . . . (series of onomatopoeic sounds). I could eat a foot, a knee, I'd chew up one ball, then the other ball, I could devour my prick then I'd get stuck into one buttock, then the other; can you just see me with one buttock in my hand, and the other . . . damn . . . I'd chew all my insides, I'd stick a hand right up there and out would come the guts . . . (Onomatopoeic sounds. Mimes feeling great pain in his backside.) . . . I've torn my arse apart . . . (Babble of sounds. Mimes hauling his intestines from his stomach. Blows on them to clean them up a bit. Series of raspberries.) All that shit . . . damnation what a world . . . aaah . . . I'm ravenous . . . (Further tirade. Stops short. Goes forward to front of stage.) What a lot of folk! Nice people! Could tuck into one of you! . . .[22]

When viewed, as in one of the many recorded pieces of his work, *The Starving Zanni* comes alive, the sounds evoking various food items and the *grammelot* realizing for the viewer both his hunger and short-lived satiation, followed by the ever-present pain. What Fo describes as cooking in a pot becomes "bloup, bloup;" the connotation of the *bloup* associating the gesture of mixing with a liquid stew or soup that we can almost taste just by the sound.[23] The boiling temperature and bubbling are suggested, too, by the rapid succession of sounds which seem to increase as the mixing and heat spread throughout the brew. In this manner, the sounds are visual enough to awaken in the audiences' imagination an actual hot,

gooey soup. Likewise, to concretize the Zanni's "chew[ing] all my insides," onomatopoeic sounds accompany pretending to pull long strings of intestines, like sausage strings, out of the mouth. The sounds help to create the images of the eaten body parts as well as the invented food items. The association of sound with the substance it refers to is made more credible through a correspondence or a suggestiveness of the phonic units incorporated. Like the imaginary words created in the game of *grammellotte*, Fo's Zanni uses words to conjure images the audience is asked to co-create by believing in the *grammelot* created by the actor.

Pretending—Mimetic Verbal Expression in Performance

Just as *grammelot* allows the actor to create images through the expression of sounds, it also allows the actor to impersonate things or people through the performance of "their" language. In this manner, it is a mimetic device incorporated within an already representational field that highlights the performativity implicit in imitation. The actor may use *grammelot* to impersonate an animal, for instance, a common performance device, wherein the animal's communication is invoked by imaginary sound units the audience associates with the animal. This is particularly evident for the character of the Zanni, since he is associated with external performative markers such as extreme physicality, an acrobatic ability, and a tight-fitting costume which reveals his form rather than his acculturation.

One of the famous seventeenth-century commedia dell'arte players, Domenico Biancolelli, who enacted the role of the Zanni, often performed using nonsensical yet emotive sounds which evoked language.[24] In *Baron todesco, Le baron allemand*, in which Biancolelli performed the role of Harlequin, this common practice is in the text. Of course, since the performance was improvised, textual evidence is difficult to come by, and scholars of the genre must rely on evidence couched within *scenarios* (short plot summaries) and *zibaldone* (actor's manuals) such as the one from which I draw this example.[25] Harlequin is disgruntled because a thief has stolen his food, and he describes what has happened to another character, Trivelin, while enacting the part of the thief. "Then, I leave the house, pretending to chew something and I yell 'stop thief!' and I tell him [Trivelin?] that as I was eating a good piece of meat this thief [a cat] grabbed it from me, taking it while saying *gniao, gniao* and I ran after."[26] The imitation of the thief (or the cat) in Harlequin's utterance of *gniao, gniao*, may be interpreted as interrupted sounds comparable to a kind of *grammelot*. The sounds are phonic replacements of speech, interrupted sounds which have no fixed semantics but which nonetheless achieve expressivity. In this example, Harlequin becomes the cat in the story by his impersonation of the sounds the cat makes.

Harlequin's imitation of an animal is related to an important aspect of *grammelot*—its proximity to the English word *grumble* which designates animal-like sounds.[27] More than any other word which came up through my research,

grommeler seems to be the key to understanding the derivation of *grammelot*. Furthermore, the connotations of dissatisfaction, complaint, grumble, hunger, despair for expression, and incomprehensible expression associated with the English verb *to grumble* are all implicit in the performance of *grammelot* on stage, as in the example of Fo's use of *grammelot* in correspondence with the scene of *The Starving Zanni*. The incomprehensible sounds emphasize the Zanni's despair and inability (perhaps due to hunger) to articulate "real" words. This discovery is the key for an historic understanding of the term which broadens *grammelot* beyond Fo and thus makes *grammelot* a synchronic and diachronic phenomenon capable of describing historic and current performance practices.

Grammelot as Emotive Expression

The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms that the English word *grumble* is derived from the French *grommeler*, which *Oxford* defines as "to mutter between the teeth."[28] The definition of *grumble* is "an act of grumbling; a murmur, of discontent or dissatisfaction; a subdued utterance of complaint. Of an animal: A low growl. Of thunder: a rumble."[29] Hence, *The Oxford English Dictionary*'s explication of the term suggests there are three aspects of the definition of *grumble* which are implicit in *grammelot*: first, the lack of clarity or semantic specificity inherent in expression which is uttered as a *grumble*; second, the ill humor which contributes to the element of complaint present in grumbling; finally, the animal associations of the word, which stem from its proximity to a growl, suggest grumbling can be a mimicking of animal sounds, which are kinds of nonsense languages to humans.

Complaint or dissatisfaction is another facet of *grumble* associated with the word *grammelot* which often itself connotes dissatisfaction. *Grumble* is described as "a subdued utterance of complaint;" *to grumble* is "to utter murmurs expressive of discontentment . . . to complain."[30] Inarticulation reflects the utterer's discontent; therefore, he reluctantly expresses his opinion, or is so emotionally overcome that he cannot completely express himself. Looking back to Fo's example of *The Starving Zanni*, recalling the Zanni's despair and discontent at his lack of nourishment, one can see his grumbling expresses this dissatisfaction while communicating more specific complaints. He says " . . . damnation what a world . . . aaah . . . I'm ravenous . . . (further tirade)."[31] The Zanni's uttered *aaah* is an expression of anger and frustration which initiates an emotive but not semantically-bound expression that extends into his tirade. The tirade, occasioned by the Zanni's hunger, will surely be an expression of upset and discontentment.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a Shakespearean example of use of the word which confirms the lack of clarity in articulation that the definition of *grumble* suggests, since it is described as "to express or utter with mumbling, muttering or complaining."[32] *The Taming of the Shrew* (IV i 170) is quoted: "You

heedless iolt-heads, and unmanner'd slaues, What, do you **grumble**? Ile be with you straight [emphasis my own]."[33] And furthermore, the dialogue between Kent and the fool in *King Lear* (III iv line 43), is also cited as an example:

> Kent: Giue me thy hand, who's there?
> Foole: A spirite, a spirite, he sayes his name's poore Tom.
> Kent: What art thou that dost grumble there i'th'straw? Come
> forth. . . . [34]

Implicit in this last example too is the association of the term with animal-like qualities. Therefore, when Kent asks the fool "What art thou that dost grumble there i'th'straw?" the grumbling suggests an animal, not a human, who lives in straw. Of course, the Zanni himself, as in Fo's *The Starving Zanni*, as a character drawn from commedia dell'arte, is often associated with animal-like behavior, further connecting *grammelot* with *grumble*.[35] And in performing *The Starving* Zanni, Fo incorporates snorting, spiting sounds, and generally animalistic sounds.

The Game of Language and Parodic Uses of *Grammelot*

There is a self-reflexivity implicit in *grammelot* where it becomes a performative game of metalanguage in which the actor allows the audience to "win" by guessing his meaning. While the audience and actor have words for the images performed, they are simultaneously aware of the word they would normaly use to designate something, and of the distance between that and the sound the performer actually uses within his *grammelot* to designate the same thing. Thus, the pleasure of *grammelot* results from the inventiveness of the actor as well as from the audience's awareness of this inventiveness. Therefore, *grammelot* exposes to the audience the fact that the theatre is making fun of language, and, since language is part of theatre-making, this "pointing out" is self-reflexive. What the actor achieves in *grammelot* is a synthesis of sounds that make sense in their performance context. Like a cook, the actor mixes found ingredients, changing them, in order to create a new result.

The association of food and language-making may be more than coincidental. Just as flour, water, and eggs are rendered solid and unified in dough, phonic unit aggregates create the semblance of language in a performance of *grammelot*. In fact, the *grande dizionario della lingua italiana* associates the word *gramolare*, "to amalgamate, render homogeneous,"[36] with *grammelot* where *gramolare* is specifically related to the action of mixing and consolidating in pasta making. Although seemingly unconnected with the theatre practice, this association is interesting because interlingual dialogue that incorporates various idioms, such as the languages used in commedia dell'arte performances, is often referred to as "macaronic."[37] Equally as self-reflexive, Fo's starving character who contrives a

meal with the help of imaginary sounds used to describe the ingredients, is a reflection of Fo in the actor's use of these sounds to create a would-be language.

The association of "macaronic" and interlingual speech is reinforced by Wartburg's *franzosisches etymologisches worterbuch* in which the word *grumer* or *grumel* is described as stemming from meat and chewing.[38] The *Wartburg* dictionary also indicates a seventeenth-century term, *esgrumeler* which means to separate or to dissolve.[39] These words are also associated with the verb *engrumeler,* meaning to put into little blocks or lumps.[40] If *esgrumeler* conveys chewing, which separates food into small lumps (*mottes*), then *grammelot* can be regarded as an act which separates language into pieces, or words (*mots*).

The association of the word *grumble* with food-related activities may be more easily illustrated by an example from the period Fo claims to have originated the technique of *grammelot*. In this example, the incorporation of eating and communicative distortion suggests a natural connection in commedia dell'arte of these two otherwise dissociated acts which are, nonetheless, etymologically related. Since both incorporate the mouth, eating and speaking are posited as competing activities. One cannot eat and speak simultaneously. In this *grammelot*, though the Zanni is attempting to simultaneously eat and speak, he fails at both activities. His ineffectiveness draws attention to the dysfunctionality of the cultural enterprise of language, and so, the *grammelot* becomes a burlesque of culture. The focus of attention on the mouth in its two activities of eating and speaking effectively dismembers the mouth from a fully functional body. Hence, the mouth becomes an impotent machine since it produces unintelligible sounds. This particular example highlights the marriage in commedia dell'arte of competing activities as a technique that produces laughter in the audience. But this impossible union of activities also reinforces the conglomeration in commedia of different languages as a technique of highlighting the ridiculous in either language and in language entirely.

Conclusion

It is difficult to conclude which is the correct etymological background of the term *grammelot*. At this point, what is most valuable to recognize is that the term is more than an appellation for a practice Fo engages in performance. *Grammelot* is an historic category within the tradition of comic performance extending as far back as the commedia dell'arte. Etymologically, it is probably associated with the English word *grumble* which connotes inarticulation, complaint, and an animal-like attitude. The practice of nonsense language, called at various times *gramellotte* or *grammelot*, suggests the existence of the term before this century. And the various ways the technique is incorporated, as suggested by Dario Fo's work, reflect on different aspects of the definition of this performance term.

I have registered possible points to consider in an exploration of the etymology of *grammelot,* a technique that is important not only as a comic device

used by Dario Fo, but as a possible link to earlier comic techniques of the commedia dell'arte. This exploration has not been solely philological in its orientation but has sought to incorporate examples drawn from performance, grounding the etymological search in terms of its implications for the theatre. Though by no means the first to incorporate the term *grammelot,* or some variant of it, Fo is certainly important in his reintroduction of *grammelot* to theatre discourse. In my examination, I have found *grammelot* to be a term with a possible root similarity to the seventeenth-century term *grammellotte,* as well as to the words *esgrumeler* and the location Grumello dei Zanchi, all of which have significant association with the term as it is known today. Most promising, the link root of *gram* associates the practice with the word we know of in English as *to grumble,* which had counterparts in various languages and is evident in Shakespeare. Because *grumble* connotes inarticulation, discontent, and an animal-like sound, it is closely linked with *grammelot* as a performance technique.

Notes

1. I am transcribing a portion from Fo's videotaped performance of *The Starving Zanni* in *il meglio di Mistero Buffo,* dir. for television, Arturo Corso, perf. Dario Fo, Franca Rame, C.T.R.F., 1991. In his translation of Fo's *manuale minimo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), Joe Farrell notes these lines as "I'm starving. Never been so hungry . . . oh God . . . (*series of onomatopoeic sounds*)" in *The Tricks of the Trade,* Dario Fo, trans. Joe Farrell, ed. Stuart Hood (London: Methuen Drama, 1991) 43. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own.

2. Fo, *The Tricks of the Trade* 56.

3. 34.

4. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: G& C Merriam Company, 1981) 480.

5. As noted by Rudlin, the spelling of the word *grammelot* varies from *grummelot,* the term used by the school of Jacques Copeau, as passed down through Michel Saint-Denis, to Dario Fo's version, *grammelot.* John Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994) 60. I will use Fo's spelling of *grammelot* in all my references to the term.

6. Contemporary dictionaries, influenced by twentieth-century performers such as Fo, who have included the term in contemporary theatre discourse, have begun to include the word *grammelot.* *Grammelot* is officially designated in contemporary dictionaries such as the *Zingarelli's Italian Dictionary,* ed. Miro Dogliotti and Luigi Rosiello (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli S.p. A, 1990) as a French word whose etymology is uncertain: "an emission of sounds, in the rhythm and intonation of expressions of discourse of a language, without pronouncing the real words, which characterizes the comic or farcical recitation of certain actors." *"Emissione di suoni simili, nel ritmo e nell'intonazione, espressioni di discorsi di una lingua, senza la pronuncia di parole reali che caratterizza la recitazione comica o farsesca di alcuni attori"* 840-841. This corresponds to Fo's definition and may, indeed,

result from Fo's use of the practice in his performances such as in *The Starving Zanni* and *Scapino's Lesson in French*, presented independently or as part of his one-person show *Mistero Buffo* (*The Comic Mystery*).

7. For theories as to why *grammelot* was incorporated historically, see Marisa Pizza's excellent book on Dario Fo's monologues *il gesto, la parola, l'azione: poetica, drammaturgia e storia dei monologhi di Dario Fo* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1996) 105-106.

8. The Vieux Colombier was established as a school by Jacques Copeau in Paris and dedicated to training through practice, not merely through archival research or reconstruction, Rudlin 3.

9. Michel Saint-Denis, *Training for the Theatre: Premises and Promises*, ed. Suria Saint-Denis. (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1982) 34.

10. Biancolelli, affectionately known to his French audiences as Dominique, lived and worked in France with the Fiorelli-Locatelli Troupe, known as the *Comédiens Italiens*. Biancolelli first played his signature role of Harlequin in 1661 as part of the *Comédiens Italiens*. Pierre Louis Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy* (1929; London: George G. Harrap & Co. ; New York: Dover Publications, 1966) 97-98.

11. Examples of eyewitness accounts reveal the mixture of verbal play techniques incorporated within these performances. For instance, see Massimo Troiano's reaction to a performance held in Bavaria in 1568 at the Trausnitz castle in which, as he says, the language was inscrutable but the meaning was understood. "The most part of them could not understand what he was saying. . . ." " . . . *[L]e più chi vi erano non intendevano lo che si deicevano . . .*" Troiano in Roberto Tessari, *Commedia dell'arte: la maschera e l'ombra* (Milano: Mursia editore S.p.A: 1981-1984) 114.

12. This is a fact studied in depth by the eminent linguist Roman Jakobson. See his *The Sound Laws of Child Language and Their Place in General Phonology* (1949) in *On Language* (1990), ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995) 294-305.

13. Fo, *Tricks* 57-58.

14. The definition of *grammellotte* is specified as imaginary words or "mets imaginaire [sic.]" Edmond Huguet, ed, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, Vol. 4 (Paris: Didier, 1934) 356.

15. The exact phrase mentioned is "en jus [sic.] de gramellotte," and it appears to be taken from *Navig. du compagnon à la bouteille*. Ibid.

16. *La navigation du compaignon à la bouteille, avec le discourse des ars et sciences de maistre Hambrelin* was published in Paris by Claude Micard in 1576 (Hugnet I:16).

17. *Giullare*, often refered to as *Jongleurs*, were itinerant performers in the medieval period who performed in the street or square, entertaining people with their talents. Joe Farrell remarks on the significance of the *giullare* for Fo in his introduction to *The Tricks of the Trade* (6); Fo remarks on the *jongleurs* in his *Mistero Buffo* performance. Dario Fo, *Mistero Buffo*, in *Dario Fo: Plays: 1* (1988; London: Methuen Drama, 1997) 46.

18. Fo uses the plural Zanni for the *grammelot dello zanni* or the *grammelot* of the Zanni, and I will also uses Zanni instead of Zanno. Since Zanni is derived from the Italian name Giovanni, the seemingly plural ending is part of a proper name.

19. "*Grumello: Nome di alcune località Italiane* [. . .] *Comune della Lombardia* [. . .] *in*

provincia di Cremona" Pietro Fedele, *grande dizionario enciclopedico UTET*, 3rd ed. vol. 9 (Turino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1969) 544.

20. ". . . *[D]el monte. Commune della Lombardia* [. . .] *in provincia de Bergamo* [. . .]" 544.

21. Since this coincidence has never been mentioned, I make note of this theory here. This speculation, however, requires further research and explanation.

22. Fo, *Tricks* 43-44.

23. I am referring to the videotaped performed version of *The Starving Zanni*, found in *Dario Fo: Il meglio di Mistero Buffo* (C.T.R.F., Polygram video, 1995).

24. Since *zanni* is a general designation for several types of characters in the family of the servants, there are varations on the kinds of *zanni* that were popular at given times. Harlequin, like Truffaldino, like Buratino, and others were variations on the role of the comic figure who generally was a servant, usually from Northern Italy; in Harlequin's case, Bergamot.

25. Biancolelli's *canevas* (scenario) of Baron Todesco is found in a collection by Thomas Guelette who translated into French the Italian *zibaldone* (diary) that Biancolelli kept. Though "twice removed" from the source text, this material nevertheless is precious for researchers of the period and provides valuable information. The modem version of Biancolelli's text for *Baron Todesco, Le Baron Allemand* is found in Stephania Spada, *Domenico Biancolelli ou l'art d'improviser: Textes, documents, introduction, notes* (Naples: Institut Universitaire Oriental, 1969) 45-49.

26. "*Ensuitte je sors de la maison en feignant de macher quelque chose et je crie au volleur a l'assassin je luy dis que comme je mangeois un bon morceau de viande ce volleur me l'a arraché et l'a emporté en faisant* gniao, gniao, *et je cours apres* [sic]." 46.

27. J. A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. vol. 6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 904.

In Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire universel*, vol. 8 (Paris: Administration Du Grand Dictionnaire Universale, 1865) *grommeler* is described as "from the ancient German, *grummelu*, Swedish *grymta*, English *to grumble*, words formed from the prefix *ge*, from which nothing has stayed except the first letter, and a primitive (original) which signifies to tumble or to mutter, to make a muffled or muted sound . . . to moan while murmuring: *grommeler* between their teeth." "(Gromelé) *du germanique: ancien allemand* grummelu, *Suédois* grymta, *anglais* to grumble, *mots formés d'un préfixe ge, dont il n'est resté que la première lettre, et d'un primitif qui signifie* gronder, *faire un bruit sourd. Double la lettre l devant un e muet:* Je grommelle, tu grommelleras. *Fam. Se plaindre en murmurant:* Grommeler *entre ses dents. Ne faire que grommeler*" 1547.

28. *The Oxford English Dictionary* also notes as other derivations the Dutch *grommelen* and the German *grummeln* 904.

29. Simpson and Weiner 904.

30. 904.

31. Fo, *The Tricks of the Trade* 44.

32. Simpson and Weiner 904.

33. 904.

34. 904.

35. The specific Zanni Harlequin is often associated with a cat because of the actor's dexterity and flexibility in performing acrobatics. But all Zanni have highly stylized masks with an animal-like nature, as suggested by hairs, whiskers, and the tanned leather used in making the original masks.

36. "*Amalgamare, rendere omogenea.*" Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana.* vol. 6 (Turino: Unione Tipografico, 1971) 1030.

37. Commedia dell'arte incorporated many dialects within a single performance where each character was associated with a particular region in Italy or Europe.

38. *Grumel* is associated with a piece of beef from the breast which is found between the legs. "'*[P]ièce de la poitrine du boeuf qui se trouve entre les jambes.*'" *Grumer* is defined as chewing quickly or with sound. "'*mâcher vite et comme en cachette*' . . . '*broyer avec les dents*' . . . '*grincer des dents*'." Walther V. Wartburg, *Franzosisches etymologisches worterbuch eine darstellung des galloromanischen sprachschatzes*, vol. 4 (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1952) 288.

39. "*'séparer, dissoudre.*'" 287.

40. "*'mettre en petites mottes.*" 287.

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