

## 2. The Author's *Selbstgespräche*: Fontane's Communicative Revision Practice

It is no secret that dispositions become texts and texts become smooth texts through elaboration and revision. Fontane is not exempt from this rule, and yet the common reconstructions of his revision process do not tell the whole story. Buying into Fontane's self-descriptions, scholars usually present him as someone who writes the first drafts of his texts rapidly, in an eruptive "[Erzähl-]Fluss" (Berbig, "Mediale Textprozesse," 104), and then spends a lot of time refining them slowly, an action that Fontane himself calls "pusseln." While these accounts are right to assume that there are different tempi within Fontane's working process, they nonetheless ignore the core mode of production and productivity to which Fontane adheres: that is, compiling. His revision process is not about writing and refining; his revision process is about managing the fundamental heterogeneity of his source materials, handling the creative potential of the pastiche, reconciling the differences between foreign sources and his own additions, and organizing an abundance of discrete passages of text. Fontane's revision process, to use yet again his own terminology from his personal notes, is much more about "einschieben," "einschalten," "einstreuen," "verwenden," "unterbringen," "erledigen," "benutzen," and "anknüpfen" than it is about "schreiben."<sup>118</sup> He wrestles with a problem that he also observes acutely in other compilers, and that he calls—disrespectfully yet technically precise—the problem of the "Wurstmaschine," meaning that compilers have to homogenize their production if they do not want to end up with "Salat, Kompendiumsgemengsel" (HFA IV.4: 613).

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<sup>118</sup> These and similar verbs appear frequently in Fontane's notes as quoted in Petersen 16, 22, 28, 39, 55, and Radecke, *Vom Schreiben*, 246; they also appear, among other places, in E3, 1v, 7r, and 22r.

Seeded Content – **Johannes Gutenberg - Wikipedia**  
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**Johannes Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg** (/joʊˈhɑːnɪs ˈɡuːtən, bɜːrɡ, -ˈhænɪs-/ *yoh-**HA(H)**N-iss **GOO**-tən-burg*<sup>[1]</sup>; c. 1400<sup>[2]</sup> – February 3, 1468) was a [German](#) [blacksmith](#), [goldsmith](#), [printer](#), and [publisher](#) who introduced [printing](#) to Europe. His introduction of mechanical [movable type](#) printing to Europe started the [Printing Revolution](#) and is widely regarded as the most important invention of the second millennium, the seminal event which ushered in the [modern period](#) of human history.<sup>[3]</sup> It played a key role in the development of the [Renaissance](#), [Reformation](#), the [Age of Enlightenment](#), and the [scientific revolution](#) and laid the material basis for the modern [knowledge-based economy](#) and the [spread of learning to the masses](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

Gutenberg in 1439 was the first European to use the [printing press](#) and [movable type](#) in Europe. Among his many contributions to printing are: the invention of a process for mass-producing movable type;<sup>[citation needed]</sup> the use of oil-based [ink](#) for printing books;<sup>[5]</sup> adjustable molds;<sup>[6]</sup> mechanical movable type; and the use of a wooden printing press similar to the agricultural [screw presses](#) of the period.<sup>[7]</sup> His truly epochal invention was the combination of these elements into a practical system that allowed the mass production of printed books and was economically viable for printers and readers alike. Gutenberg's method for making type is traditionally considered to have included a [type metal](#) alloy and a [hand mould](#) for casting type. The alloy was a mixture of lead, tin, and [antimony](#) that melted at a relatively low temperature for faster and more economical casting, cast well, and created a durable type.

In [Renaissance](#) Europe, the arrival of mechanical movable type printing introduced the era of [mass communication](#) which permanently altered the structure of society. The relatively unrestricted circulation of information—including revolutionary ideas—transcended borders, captured the masses in the [Reformation](#) and threatened the power of political and religious authorities; the sharp increase in [literacy](#) broke the monopoly of the literate elite on education and learning and bolstered the emerging [middle class](#). Across Europe, the increasing cultural self-awareness of its people led to the rise of proto-[nationalism](#), accelerated by the flowering of the European [vernacular languages](#) to the detriment of [Latin](#)'s status as [lingua franca](#). In the 19th century, the replacement of the hand-operated Gutenberg-style press by [steam-powered rotary](#)

[presses](#) allowed printing on an [industrial](#) scale, while Western-style printing was adopted all over the world, becoming practically the sole medium for modern bulk printing.<sup>[18]</sup>

The use of movable type was a marked improvement on the handwritten manuscript, which was the existing method of book production in Europe, and upon [woodblock printing](#), and revolutionized European book-making. Gutenberg's [printing technology spread](#) rapidly throughout Europe and later the world.

His major work, the [Gutenberg Bible](#) (also known as the 42-line Bible), has been acclaimed for its high aesthetic and technical quality.

Around 1439, Gutenberg was involved in a financial misadventure making polished metal mirrors (which were believed to capture holy light from religious relics) for sale to pilgrims to [Aachen](#): in 1439 the city was planning to exhibit its collection of relics from [Emperor Charlemagne](#) but the event was delayed by one year due to a severe flood and the capital already spent could not be repaid. When the question of satisfying the investors came up, Gutenberg is said to have promised to share a "secret". It has been widely speculated that this secret may have been the idea of printing with [movable type](#). Also around 1439–40, the [Dutch Laurens Janszoon Coster](#) came up with the idea of printing.<sup>[18]</sup> Legend has it that the idea came to him "like a ray of light".<sup>[19]</sup>

Until at least 1444 Gutenberg lived in [Strasbourg](#), most likely in the St. Arbogast parish. It was in Strasbourg in 1440 that he is said to have perfected and unveiled the secret of printing based on his research, mysteriously entitled *Aventur und Kunst* (enterprise and art). It is not clear what work he was engaged in, or whether some early trials with printing from movable type may have been conducted there. After this, there is a gap of four years in the record. In 1448, he was back in Mainz, where he took out a loan from his brother-in-law [Arnold Gelthus](#), quite possibly for a printing press or related paraphernalia. By this date, Gutenberg may have been familiar with [intaglio](#) printing; it is claimed that he had worked on copper [engravings](#) with an artist known as the [Master of Playing Cards](#).<sup>[20]</sup>

By 1450, the press was in operation, and a [German poem](#) had been printed, possibly the first item to be printed there.<sup>[22]</sup> Gutenberg was able to convince the wealthy moneylender [Johann Fust](#) for a loan of 800

Fontane addresses this problem in two ways. Outwardly, he simply conceals it, describing his production process as different from what it actually is. In a letter to Wilhelm Hertz, for example, Fontane claims to have produced *Vor dem Sturm* without poetic rules and entirely “ganz nach mir selbst, nach meiner Neigung und Individualität [...], ohne jegliches bestimmte Vorbild,” asserting further that his goal as a writer is to do justice to himself and his “Stoff” (*Briefe an Hertz*, 130). Making his novel an equivalent of his individuality as a person in this rather unscrupulously-staged self-description, Fontane mobilizes the strongest concept available to rebut the impression that his project could consist of a number of different parts that are actually not his own. (Note that in the case of the *Wanderungen* project, too, Fontane mobilizes the concept of “individuality” to prevent the impression that his episodes could be unoriginal; see Chapter One.) After the publication of *Vor dem Sturm*, he goes so far as to simulate a surprise about the content of his own book, claiming that he was unaware that it contains, “ganz gegen mein Wissen und Willen,” a pious tendency. Fontane maintains that this tendency is so natural that he could never have manufactured it, even if he had wanted to, and arrives at the conclusion that apparently, the content of *Vor dem Sturm* is “nichts als der Ausdruck meiner Natur” (*Briefe an Hertz*, 196).

Within his own paper cosmos, Fontane’s treatment of the problem of homogenizing his sources is very different, however. For instead of concealing the problem, he makes it explicit and develops a mechanized practice to tackle it: he puts himself in a position in which he can read and evaluate his own drafts, dispositions, and compilations-in-the-making from a distant perspective. But unlike in a typical revision process, Fontane does not just edit his texts and directly write changes into his manuscripts. Rather, he employs extra sheets of paper to record his reading impressions of sections of his compilations and to note down instructions for

revision. He *physically* separates the processes of drafting, elaborating, and refining his compilations, from those of reading and evaluating them, and he realizes both sets of operations with the help of different media of notation.<sup>119</sup> As a result, he can relate sections of his drafts and his reading impressions to one another—or, to be more precise, he can apply the reading impressions and instructions to revision of the drafts. This practice enables Fontane to force the difficult revision of the extremely heterogeneous abundance of textual components into a schema, which, in turn, helps to keep the abundance processable. A salient example of this mechanized (yet not necessarily mechanical) revision practice can be found in the drafts of *Der Stechlin*. On an extra sheet of paper that Fontane adds to a bundle of individual scenes, he notes:

Capitelanfänge und Einzelszenen bis zum Eintreffen in Kloster Wutz. Alles ist hier allererster Entwurf, also durch das Andre schon überholt; aber mancherlei aus diesem zuerst Hingeworfenen wird gut zu gebrauchen sein.  
Ich muß es in die Capitel=Convolute einschieben, liegen lassen, dann lesen und dann auf dem Convolut ganz kurze Angaben machen (in richtiger Reihenfolge): das das etc. [...].  
(Qtd. in Petersen 16)

In this example, Fontane literally spells out the order of the next steps to be performed, and the rigor with which he instructs himself is indicative of the effort that is required to produce coherent text out of the heterogeneous sources. Yet even more significant than the rigor of his self-instructions is the *form* that they take: separating drafting from reading and evaluating, Fontane turns revision into a *communicative process* in which two instances of Fontane's authorship—Fontane-the-compiler and Fontane-the-reader—talk to one another in the form of a conversation that the author has with himself (“Ich muß...”). Previous inquiries into his manuscripts have also characterized his revision practice as a “Selbstgespräch” in which the author gives himself “Regiebemerkungen” (e.g., Hettche, “Erste Skizze,” 217). Although these

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<sup>119</sup> This can be seen as an extension of his practice of separating from one another projects that are in different stages, and realizing the separation with the help of the “Kasten” discussed in Chapter Three.

studies have produced a number of significant results regarding Fontane's working methods and his narrative technique, they stop short of analyzing what this phenomenon really means for his poetics; in fact, none of the existing inquiries fully acknowledges the "-gespräch" in "Selbstgespräch."<sup>120</sup> This, however, is the decisive point: by allocating the steps in his revision process to different instances and putting them in conversation with one another, Fontane makes the entire process subject to the recursive logic of communication. Externalizing his reading impressions, he can observe and assess them more easily, re-read them, and relate them anew to the sections of the compilation to which they refer. This process allows him to observe his own readings of his drafts. He thus enters into a movement that Christoph Hoffmann, analyzing the notebooks of Ernst Mach, calls "Schreib-Lese-Schleifen" ("Umgebungen," 90), and through these "loops of reading and revising," Fontane continuously manipulates and reworks his heterogeneous drafts. The entire process is such that Fontane "von Anbeginn eine spätere Überarbeitung einkalkuliert[e]," as Hettche has concluded ("Die Handschriften zu *Vor dem Sturm*," 199), without connecting this conclusion to the communicative logic of Fontane's revision practice.

Fontane applies this procedure to all kinds of materials that are part of his compilations, from unmodified source texts, to dispositions in the form of keywords, to drafts that have undergone multiple rewrites. The externalized stance of the reader, then, provides some homogeneity in the challenging process of compiling and helps him accommodate the extremely

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<sup>120</sup> Petersen, for example, views the "Selbstgespräch" as a symptom of Fontane's "pedantische Schwerfälligkeit des sorgfältigen und umständlichen Mitsichzurategehens" (16), yet not as a process with a real impact on Fontane's poetics. Similarly focused on Fontane's personality, Berbig suggests in his analysis that the author, through the "persönliches Sprechen," finds his voice and inserts himself into the manuscript ("Mediale Textprozesse," 105). More focused on narrative technique, Hettche and Radecke show the gradual development of narrative voice out of the authorial comments (Hettche, "Die Handschriften," 201; Radecke, *Vom Schreiben*, 74–90, 121–126), but in their analyses, too, the communicative nature of this process falls short.

irregular project development. Whether a text section is in the first draft or the fifth, it becomes subject to the distinct observations of Fontane-the-reader. All parts of the project thus obtain the same status, regardless of their respective degrees of refinement. Accordingly, one finds the comments of Fontane-the-reader in almost all kinds of manuscripts and in a lot of different places within them: frequently, on the above-mentioned extra sheets of paper that Fontane adds to his bundles of drafts and sources and on the envelopes that enclose these bundles, yet also directly on the flipsides of pages with drafts and in marginalia. In the latter cases, the externalized comments of Fontane-the-reader, though not allocated to a different medium of notation, nonetheless remain clearly distinguishable from the main text to which they refer, since Fontane often circles them, sets them off with straight lines, or uses a pen in a different color. In this manner, Fontane-the-compiler and Fontane-the-reader are in a constant exchange, and the reader instructs the compiler on all compilatory core operations. For example, on a sheet added to a bulk of material for *Der Stechlin*, the reader tells the compiler how to use and combine some of the accumulated textual sources:

Notizen, die in den verschiedenen Kapiteln untergebracht werden müssen:

1. Die Geschichte vom Sühne=Blut in Siam (sehr interessant).
2. Äußerungen von Pastor Rau=Cladow über die Aufgabe der christlich Sozialen und das Unausreichende der sogenannten Konservativen.
3. gute – dem christlichen Sozialismus entsprechende Äußerungen des verstorbenen W. Wyl (Dr. Wilh. Ritter v. Wymetal). (Qtd. in Petersen 39)

In addition to directing the distribution of the material, the reader also tells the compiler the order in which he should arrange certain components (“Reihenfolge: 1. Der Aussichtsturm. Landschaftsschilderung. Kurze Plauderei. / 2. Dann ins Dorf, in die Schule zu Krippenstapel [...],” qtd. in Petersen 22), which parts he should treat as central (“Dies ist für das Gespräch zwischen Dubslav und Lorenzen die Hauptstelle [...],” qtd. in Petersen 38), and which parts he should shorten, delete, rewrite, and expand. That the reader examines the compiler’s progress,

plans the development of the project in a sometimes accountant-like fashion, and really *instructs* the compiler becomes clear from a note-to-self that at once summarizes and plots the further elaboration of the figure of Pastor Lorenz[en] in *Der Stechlin*. On an extra sheet that prefaces a bundle of materials on the pastor, Fontane writes:

Pastor Lorenz

s. auch das hier einliegende Convolut.

Pastor Lorenz ist in einer Beziehung die Hauptfigur: die Geschichte mit dem Stechlin=See, die den gedanklichen Kern des Ganzen bildet – wird durch ihn vertreten; was an der Stechlin=Geschichte Symbol und Zeichen ist, das wird durch ihn beständig gedeutet. [...] Vorläufig schweben mir folgende Situationen und Gespräche vor:

1. Lorenz am ersten Abend. Gespräch mit der Sundermann, auch vielleicht mit Rex und Czako.
  2. Lorenz am andern Vormittag. Gespräch mit Woldemar. Hierin das Gespräch über Droschin.
  3. Lorenz bei Melusinens erstem Besuch im Gespräch mit dieser. Vielleicht über Joao de Deus.
  4. Lorenz im Gespräch mit Adelheid.
  5. Lorenz im Gespräch mit dem Alten (zum Theil schon geschrieben).
  6. Lorenz im Gespräch mit Melusine nach dem Begräbnis des Alten.
- (Qtd. in Petersen 47)

Both a balance sheet and a plan for the amplification of the project, Fontane's list of situations in which the figure of the pastor comes up (or is supposed to come up) indicates how closely the reader and the compiler interact with one another in this communicative revision practice. It is through this practice of recursive exchange that Fontane drives his compiling projects forward, across the challenges that large quantities of heterogeneous sources pose.

Fontane's communicative revision practice has forceful implications for his poetics. Most importantly, this peculiar revision practice allows him to customize his projects for publication and, more specifically, for his target audiences. A closer examination of the overall stance of Fontane-the-reader brings this capacity for customization to light. It is not a mere personal stance, driven by intuition or taste alone, but one that is thoroughly reflective of the literary market; Fontane-the-reader looks at the compilations-in-the-making from the perspective of his



multiple target audiences of popular and erudite readers. The comments and instructions of Fontane-the-reader combine the different reading expectations and interpretative patterns of his lowbrow and highbrow readerships. These are expectations that Fontane-the-reader *anticipates*: he comments on his compilations from the perspective of how they *will* be received.

This practice is evident in the specific nature of the comments. It is striking that Fontane often manipulates poetic textual features that normally gain traction in the interpretations of erudite readers, including symbolism, the use of a leitmotif, the constellation of figures, charged descriptions of settings, moments of prefiguration, and, more generally speaking, interactions between form and content. In the note-to-self cited above, for example, Fontane-the-reader assigns the figure of Pastor Lorenzen a function that directly influences the symbolic interpretation of the novel (“[...] die Geschichte mit dem Stechlin=See [...] wird durch ihn vertreten; was an der Stechlin=Geschichte Symbol und Zeichen ist, das wird durch ihn beständig gedeutet [...]”). Numerous other instances could be cited in which Fontane-the-reader ensures that his compilations contain a sufficient quantity of highbrow features, including semantic lacunae purposefully inserted to open his compilations to interpretation (e.g., “Die von ihm gewählte [Lesart] unbestimmt halten,” E3, 1v). At the same time, his comments also address features of which he could assume his popular readership to be appreciative. To the drafts of *Vor dem Sturm*, for example, Fontane adds the comment: “In dem Charakter von Hoppen=Marieken die Vogelverständige und die Kräuterverständige mehr hervorheben, als bisher geschehn” (E3, 25r). With his comments, Fontane-the-reader anticipates the expectations of his broad readership and translates them into instructions for the calibration of specific literary features *while his compilations are still in progress*. In Fontane-the-reader, his multiple target audiences enter into

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