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## Intervention: „Out-of-the-way-Literatur“ oder wie man Fontanes „Mache“ in eine Ausstellung übersetzen kann – and into ,English‘



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Wer heute größere Ausstellungen kuratiert, der beschreibt und reflektiert sie in allen denkbaren Genres und Medien. In den Auftakt-, Raum- und Exponattexten der Ausstellung selbst, die so etwas wie Augenöffner und Denkanstöße für die sind, die sie besuchen. In Flyern und Broschüren, Social Media Posts, Zeitungsinterviews, Radio- und Fernsehberichten, die für die Ausstellung werben. Im Katalog, der die Ausstellung in Teilen dokumentiert und erweitert. In Vorträgen mit PowerPoint, Postern oder Architekturmodellen, in denen das Ausstellungskonzept Auftraggebern und Partnern vorgestellt wird. Nach einer Weile wiederholen sich unvermeidlich Formulierungen und verlieren zumindest für ihren Erfinder an Prägnanz, weil sie nicht mehr unmittelbar mit dem Augenblick verbunden sind, in dem durch sie ein Gedanke das erste Mal eine Form erhalten hat. Da solche Ausstellungstexte mit einem Medium verbunden sind, das zeitlich und örtlich bedingt und begrenzt ist, sind sie immer Texte über etwas, was

gewesen ist. Sie sind keine Texte, die etwas entstehen lassen, was es noch nicht gibt. Sie sind retrospektiv, nicht prospektiv, feststellend, nicht suchend.

Als Kurator wünscht man es sich natürlich anders: Die vergangene, gewesene Ausstellung sollte in einem Text immer wieder so erscheinen können, als würde sie gerade erst durch die Perspektiven und Bewegungen ihrer Besucherinnen und Besucher entstehen. Dazu fehlt dem Text allerdings, was ihn vom Medium ‚Ausstellung‘ grundlegend unterscheidet: ein realer Raum, in dem Dinge und Menschen vorübergehend zusammenkommen, die auch dann körperlich präsent sind, wenn wir sie gar nicht oder nur flüchtig sehen und sie nicht kennen und bezeichnen können. „Dieses flüchtige Sehen hat mir einen Eindruck geschaffen, den mir ein *Studium* nicht hätte geben können“, schreibt Fontane 1864 über seinen Besuch im Thorvaldsen-Museum Kopenhagen; „die Wirkung auf mein Gemüt“ hätte sich sogar „bei häufigerem Sehen [...] allgemach vermindert“.<sup>1</sup> Das, was zufällig an ihrem bestimmten Ort, in ihrem Zeitraum passiert, gehört zu einer Ausstellung dazu. Als Fontane 1857 über die Kunstausstellung in London berichtet, erwähnt er auch den Telegrafen, der unmittelbar neben dem Ausstellungsgebäude Nachrichten vom Aufstand in Indien übermittelt.<sup>2</sup> Die Museen und Ausstellungen, die Fontane in seinen Reiseberichten und Kunstkritiken beschreibt oder auch in seinen Romanen erfindet, sind Orte, an denen Menschen relativ triviale Realien und fragwürdige Artefakte mit einer ästhetischen Geschichts- und Kunsterfahrung verbinden. „Die primitive Papptafel“ mit dem Hinweis ‚Museum‘, die im Herrenhaus des Stechlin an einer Tür hängt, wolle, so erklärt Pastor Lorenzen Melusine, „wohl nur andeuten, daß es sich bei der ganzen Sache mehr um einen Scherz als um etwas Ernsthaftes handelt. Etwa wie bei Sammlung von Meer-schaumpfeifen und Tabaksdosen.“<sup>3</sup> Zum Leben erweckt werden diese Dinge, indem man sie mit Personen verbindet. „Was soll aber vor unser geistiges Auge treten, wenn wir hören ‚das ist das Reichsschwert von Schottland!‘ nichts“, klagt Fontane über eine Beschriftung in Edinburgh Castle: „Dies ist das Gebetbuch Jane Gray’s, dies der Eisenhut des großen Kurfürsten, dies die Tabacksdose des alten Fritz“, *das* hat ein Interesse; die Person selbst steht wie aus dem Grabe auf, trägt wieder die Sache oder stellt sich hinter dieselbe“.<sup>4</sup> Der alte Stechlin denkt sich gleich seinen ganzen Diener ins Museum: „wenn ich so meinen Engelke, wie er da geht und steht, ins märkische Provinzialmuseum abliefern könnte, so kriegt’ ich ein Jahrgehalt und wäre ’raus.“<sup>5</sup> Leerstellen, Offenheiten, Unsicherheiten – und damit vieles, was sich nicht genau, sondern auf vielerlei Weise und immer nur subjektiv, also vielleicht so oder so oder so in einen Text übersetzen lässt – gehören für Fontane zum Medium ‚Ausstellung‘ dazu. „Die Aufmerksamkeit richtet sich auf Bett, Stuhl, Krug. Ich bezweifle daß irgend etwas

1 HFA, III, Bd. 3/1, 687.

2 Vgl. Carmen Aus der Au: Fontane als Kunstkritiker. Berlin: De Gruyter 2017, 130.

3 GBA–Erz. Werk, Bd. 17, 325.

4 GBA–Reiselit. Werk, Bd. 2, 38.

5 GBA–Erz. Werk, Bd. 17, 13.

davon ächt ist“, notiert er 1873, als er das Coburger Lutherzimmer besichtigt: „Es wäre doch vielleicht besser zu sagen: dies ist das Lutherzimmer, hier saß er, hier dichtete er und nun alles andre der Phantasie des Besuchers zu überlassen.“<sup>6</sup> In *Cécile* besucht die Reisegesellschaft das Schloss in Quedlinburg, wo der Kastellan den „absoluten Mangel an Sehenswürdigkeiten“<sup>7</sup> durch seine Erzählkunst ausgleicht: Verlorenes wie den Thron, auf den nur noch eine Lücke in der Tapeten hinweist, inszeniert er „vor dem inneren Auge des Betrachters“.<sup>8</sup>

Aus diesen Gründen möchte ich, um die von Ende März bis Ende Dezember 2019 im Museum Neuruppin ausgerichtete, von mir kuratierte Ausstellung „fontane.200/ Autor“<sup>9</sup> in diesem Tagungsband zu zeigen, gleichsam mit Händen und Füßen sprechen und in eine andere Sprache wechseln. For me ‘English’ is a kind of fairy tale mode. I do not speak this language well. I do not speak it fluently. I have to make it up bit by bit, word by word. Certainly wrong for those who can do it well, but for me it is a possibility to describe things anew. A foreign, but simple and never-ending story of thinking in sounds, vowels, consonants, commas, points, dashes and slashes, words, names and sentences to get a grasp of an idea which makes the world go around. This alienation of language for me is a primal scene, a Urszene of reading, writing and curating. I want to show things in such a way that the visitors see them as if they saw them for the first time. I want visitors to become curious, have questions (perhaps without answers) and want to see, to think and to read more and more.

Exhibitions therefore are not a didactic setting to teach information for me, but a productive and creative process of thinking in rooms where things and human beings come together. Not only in a harmonic way, but also in confrontations, collisions, paradoxes. My personal experience as a curator is not an experience of a memorial. I don’t make exhibitions in a poet’s home or birthplace, but for the most time I make exhibitions in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach. So I focus more on papers and media of writing and reading than on media of living. I never show, for instance, the desktop of a writer, for its own sake. If I have an object out of a poet’s home, I put it together with others in a new way in the museums of the archive with its especial atmospheres. In such exhibitions out of the archive, which have the conditions of a white cube, of a newer and older gallery room and therefore something like an aura-generating atmosphere – in these museums traditional objects like writing instru-

6 F–Notizbücher, C6, 13–16r.

7 GBA–Erz. Werk, Bd. 9, 49.

8 Bettina Plett: Rahmen ohne Spiegel. Das Problem des Betrachters bei einem „Mangel an Sehenswürdigkeiten“ in Fontanes *Cécile*. In: Sabina Becker, Sascha Kiefer (Hrsg.): „Weiber weiblich, Männer männlich?“ Zum Geschlechterdiskurs in Theodor Fontanes Romanen. Tübingen: Francke 2005, 159–178, hier 161.

9 Wiss. Mitarbeit: Katharina J. Schneider, Gestaltung: Demirag Architekten mit Diethard Keppler und Andreas Jung, Medien: blubb.media, mehr: <https://fontane-200-online.de>, abgerufen am 23. April 2022.

ments, hair curls and socks are evident extensions and perform frames of the text: epitexts, paratexts, intertexts, intexts, antitexts, outtexts, nonetexts, textures ... They are things in double quotation marks, which we call in German ‘Gänsefüßchen’. If I must choose a fitting word which describes my way of exhibiting literature, I would call it “Gänsefüßchen-Ausstellungen”, “double quotation marks exhibitions”. In the years 2017/18, I made exhibitions in other places, in the Literaturhaus in Munich and Stuttgart and in Neuruppin, the birthplace of Theodor Fontane. In these exhibitions, that are not linked to archives, there is no reason to work with original objects in rooms in such an extreme way like it was done in Marbach. All of them are places with daylight and without air conditioning systems. Therefore, I changed the focus to literature itself.

In the case of Theodor Fontane his novels are very readable, easy to understand and easy to analyze. They are in an artificial, positive way ‘constructed’. This art of construction can be seen in different ways and with different methods: for instance through close reading, through distant reading, through material and textgenetic reading, through immersive reading, through focussing on the liminals between objects, pictures and texts, facts and fictions. Therefore, I developed a concept which plays with this multiperspective views on literature and, also, can manage the challenges in the museum and the town Neuruppin: The museum has 26 rooms, most of them are part of a permanent exhibition about the history of the town and the estate of the museum itself with permanent and massive showcases. The museum is situated close to the small town centre but only close (and not in the centre itself). Fontane’s birthplace still houses a pharmacy and not a memorial.

The three main chapters of the exhibition are variations in mode and density. They are all about literature and texts and answers to one main question: How are Fontane’s texts ‘made’, and how does each of us subjectively deal with this ‘making’? And how can you display this design of a poetic style in an exhibition? The chapters are: “Manufacturing. Fontane’s Head”, “Feigning. Fontane’s Inventions” and “Mixing. Fontane’s Words”.

“Fontane’s Head” shows how one gets into the mood for writing novels. How does one get mentally tuned to literary creation? The simplest answer is: write and read, collect, make notes, invent, narrate, outline, group, rearrange, build, dismantle, join together, continue to write, read some more and so on. In Fontane’s case writing a novel is linked with literal hand- and paper-work – the twisting and turning of dialogues and scenes is also a twisting and turning of paper. Fontane used methods that we know today from memory and creative techniques: He condensed his material, which he mainly took from real life to simple structures, e.g., lists, snippets of conversation, line, and overview drawings.<sup>10</sup> Thus, he was able to remember and word his

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<sup>10</sup> Vgl. Petra McGillen: *The Fontane Workshop: Manufacturing Realism in the Industrial Age of Print*. New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic 2019.

subject matter well, easily connect, expand, and interchange it. Fontane's texts are a result of this work of "pottering" and "piecing together". Even without being able to decipher them, his notes show this creative process. The showcase contains all his 67 preserved notebooks. An interactive desktop allows to imitate Fontane's working operations and to get closer to his ways of writing.

Second: "Feigning. Fontane's Inventions". Fontane's novels are marked by two poetic situations in abundance: everyday conversations and everyday events. There is gossiping about trifles, passing the time with idle chatter and even blathering on the topic of death. They show us how much each one of us (re)invents himself by language. Consciously playing with language appears as the only way to realise our full potential as an individual. This chapter of the exhibition makes the structure of the novel *Effi Briest* visible through digital text analysis. As readers, however, we constantly have the feeling that what these novels are really about remains unspoken. The characters seem to have an 'inner life' that cannot be fully grasped. In the invented reality of the novel, they make up their own little wonderful or eerie world by reading the commonplace things and places as a form of language: as sign, presage, and hint. In *Effi Briest*, Fontane's marriage story in which all of the characters end up unhappy and two even die, the author calls these poetic tricks "falsework", "Hilfskonstruktion".<sup>11</sup> In this chapter of the exhibition, we show the most famous Fontane novel from different perspectives, reaching from very far away to up-close: Very far away is the network of novel characters that, in *Effi Briest*, are characterised and connected by things and places, but also by their dialogues and lexical fields. The group of nouns that occur most frequently in this novel leads closer to the text – from "Abend", "evening" to "Zärtlichkeit", "tenderness". Looking at the text from its punctuation marks, they mark above all the peculiarities of individual speech – beside the period and the comma: dashes, question, exclamation, omission, and quotation marks.

The third chapter, "Mixing. Fontane's Words", you will encounter everywhere: both indoors and outdoors, in the museum, in the museum garden and in the old town of Neuruppin. 200 Fontane 'blots' transform Neuruppin into a landscape of words and texts. These words beautifully display Fontane's language skills – they are fun and also a serious theme in a world of misunderstandings and fakes. What does one do when an ordinary word is not enough? When our language, which depends on spoken and unspoken connections of all kinds, is imprecise and ambiguous, misleading, and sometimes even incomprehensible? Fontane invented words, mixed and 'blended' them together to express something like perceived truths and realities – or to create them in the first place, because every word offers us a certain view of the world. He makes particular use of the peculiarity of the German language to create endless composites of nouns like "Sonntagsextralangeweile", "Theatervorhangthema" and

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11 Alle Wort- und Stellennachweise: Heike Gfrereis (Hrsg.): fontane.200/Autor. Das Bilder-Wörter-Stimmen Lesebuch. Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg 2019.

“Nachmitternachtgeschichten”. In translations of Fontane’s writing these nouns are often and commonly paraphrased and not literally rewritten, e. g. in *Effi Briest* “Einschenkekunststück” (English: “A feat”, French: “une façon de verser en virtuose”, Dutch: “Een kunststuk op het gebied van het inschenken”, Spanish: “Una habilitat en l’operació”, Italian: “degno d’un virtuoso nell’arte del mescere”, Danish: “Et skjenkekunstens mesterstykke”) or “Ermutigungspromenade” (English: “Had apparently first taken a morning stroll round the plantation – or was he trying to pluck up courage?” or “Preliminary and perhaps fortifying stroll”, French: “Promenade matinale qu’il avait faite”, Dutch: “erst om moed te scheppen een ochtendwandling gemaakt had”, Spanish: “Un paseo matinal (o acaso sin otro fin que el de cobrar ánimos)”, Italian: “Una passeggiata mattutina e forse anche d’incoraggiamento”, Danish: “En liten morgentur ... Eller kanskje det var for å samle mot?”)<sup>12</sup>

Every word offers us a certain view of the world. In the existing permanent exhibition of the Museum Neuruppin, Fontane’s word formations act as a pair of glasses that allow us to look at single exhibits through his eyes and to understand his view on people, things, pictures and places, actions, and attitudes from the real as well as the invented world. The idea of this word spaces and inventions is comparable with the ‘blot’ technique of the English eighteenth-century-painter Alexander Cozens who developed the technique as a teaching aid, to liberate the imagination of the students who, he felt, spent too much time in copying the works of others. Blots were “an assemblage of accidental shapes” and “accidental forms without lines, from which ideas are presented to the mind”.<sup>13</sup>

In this artistic and also pedagogic sense we try to find a playful manner to translate Fontane’s word-creating technique. Many of this ‘word-blots’ also carry an English clue: #FontaneWouldSay. With this ironic hashtag-rubrique we have tried to translate the frequently untranslatable. How would Fontane have expressed himself in English? Fontane was not restricted to a single language only: Besides German, he spoke French from childhood, and later on also became fluent in English. Fontane had a special relationship with England. In 1844, he went on his first trip to London: for 10 days, by ship, without any money or a suitcase. The “try-out travel venture” was funded by a friend. He later made frequent visits to the English capital, came back in 1855 as Prussian correspondent and stayed for four years. Fontane liked to use the English language for its succinct form of expression. For example, he often wrote about “a nine-days wonder”. The term is explained in the novel *L’Adultera*: “Whenever there is something quite extraordinary happening in London, ‘It is a nine days wonder’, and these nine days express the longest period of excitement. That is the case in London. Here it takes a little longer, as we are a bit smaller. But the law

<sup>12</sup> Katharina J. Schneider hat diese Übersetzungen bei den Vorarbeiten für die Ausstellung „fontane.200/Autor“ im Theodor-Fontane-Archiv recherchiert.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Cozens: A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape. London: J. Dixwell 1785, 8.

remains the same.” Fontane also happily mixed languages: “Bicyclevirtuose” (#BicycleVirtuoso), “Gesammt-body” (#OverallBody), “Out-of-the-way-Literatur” (#Out-of-the-wayLiterature”) or “gentlemännisch” (#gentlemanish”).

We have tried something similar: As the richness of allusions in Fontane’s words is often untranslatable, #FontaneWouldSay is a playful treasure hunt in English. These translations are not necessarily everyday language, because we used Fontane’s method of hard and rude composition. They beautifully display and perform Fontane’s language skills – and are fun in a self-evident way. To give some examples: „Lobkugeln“ / #PraiseBullets, „Menschheits-Beglückungs-Spekulationen“ / #Mankind-blessingSpeculations, „Nachmitternachtsgeschichten“ / #Past-midnightStories, „Nicht-Mustermensch“ / #Non-modelMan, „Nichtverrücktwerdenkönnen“ / #CapabilityOfNotGoingCrazy, „ötepotöter“ / #purrnicketier, „Originalitätshascherei“ / #FishingForOriginality, „Pfefferkuchengegend“ / #GingerbreadRegion, „Schlängelgänge des Herzens“ / #WindingWaysOfTheHeart, „Schmalhansküchenmeisterstudien“ / #ScroogeStudies, „Sonntags-Extralangeweile“ / #SpecialSundayBoredom, „Tiergarten-Regenwürmerlaterne“ / #Tiergarten-earthwormLantern, „Unglücks-Ei“ / #EggOfUnhappiness, „Verdrießlichkeitsfalten“ / #FurrowsOfFretfulness, Vergißmeinnicht-Augen / #Forget-me-notEyes, „Vollblutberlinerin“ / #ThoroughbredBerliner, „Weltverbesserungsleidenschaft“ / #WorldimprovementPassion, „Zeitungsleserstandpunkt“ / #StandpointOfTheNewspaperReader, „Zweimenschensystem“ / #Two-peopleSystem.<sup>14</sup>

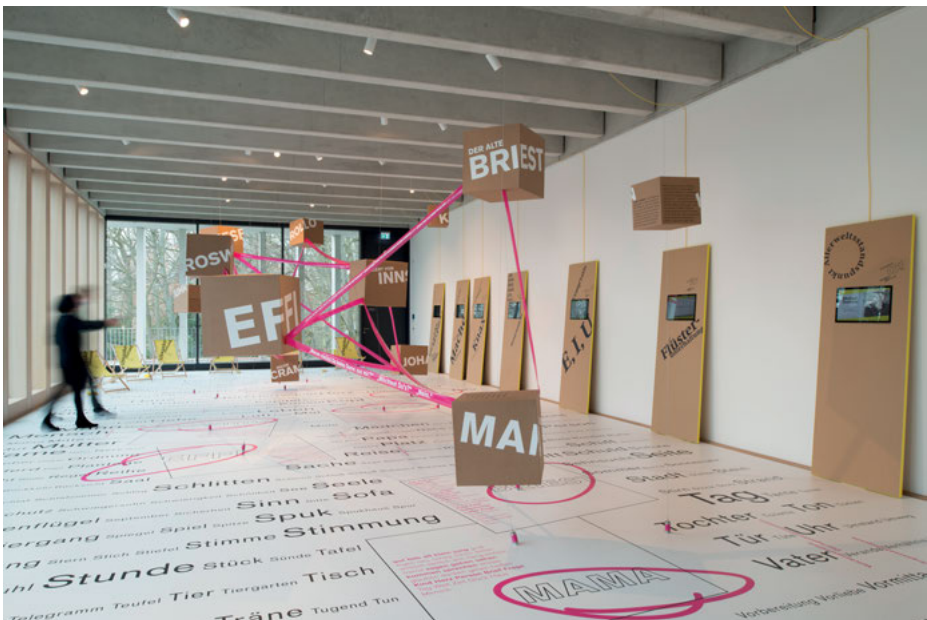
One of these typical Fontane word combinations, titled “So oder so ähnlich” (#SameOrSomethingSimilar), explains this relativizing playful method of composition in the act of translation: “Like this or something. Like this or completely different. Maybe, maybe not. Yes and no at the same time.” Fontane had a preference for such twists that create the effect of reality, precisely because they accept that reality is something subjective. It was like that for us and could perhaps actually have been a little smaller or larger. Someone else sees it differently. So we want to translate Fontane’s words with an individual, personal and exaggerated attitude and gesture in which talking-with-the-whole-body, talking-with-hands-and-feet still lives on.

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14 Übersetzungen: Katharina J. Schneider mit Mirjam Haas und Tobias Kunz.



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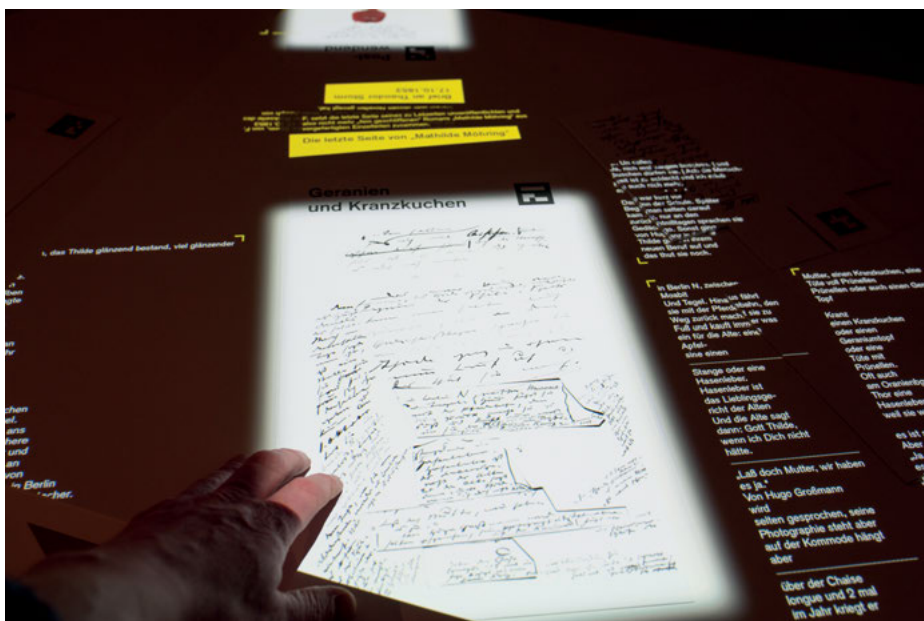
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