

John B. Lyon

“Anzeigen,” Supplementarity, and Modernity in Fontane

In recent years, much has been written about Fontane’s media, but comparatively little has been written about the “Anzeigen,” “Annoncen,” or advertisements that appear in at least nine of his major novels as well as in his *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*. These brief blurbs are often death or marriage announcements, but also commercial advertisements or even public warnings. Most of them lack all literary pretense and simply state facts such as marriage or death that could be found in a chronicle or register. Fontane not only refers to “Anzeigen,” but in many cases also prints them out in full in his novels. He repeatedly draws his readers’ attention to this minor and presumably non-literary genre, forcing us to ask why a non-literary genre merits space and attention in Fontane’s novels and what insights it gives us into Fontane’s writing. And why, with the increased scholarly attention on Fontane’s media in recent years, has this particular medium been relatively neglected?

Ilinca Iurascu’s 2014 article, “‘Annoncenliteratur’: Kleist, Fontane and the Rustle of Paper,” was one of the first studies to address these and related questions.¹ Iurascu highlights not only the prevalence of “Annoncen” in Fontane but also their disruptive function: they typically interrupt the narrative flow when a postal carrier enters with a delivery of letters, newspapers, and advertisements. She argues that the immediate proximity of “Annoncen” to letters devalues the epistolary medium, a once dominant form of medial communication. The “Annonce” signals the death of the epistle, for the letter becomes yet another piece of disposable media (261). This occurs within a larger context of media transformation at the end of the nineteenth century in Germany.

The current study situates Fontane within this historical media transformation and argues that “Anzeigen” in his texts are not secondary or coincidental, but fundamental. They evidence a narrative strategy of supplementarity, one that relies on “Anzeigen” at the same time that it claims to be different from them. We can read his novels in particular as expositions on “Anzeigen.” They generate narratives and indicate a shift towards visual culture; they highlight Fontane’s keen awareness of literature’s role within capitalist consumer culture.

¹ Iurascu’s study is part of a larger, emerging subfield focusing on media and media studies in Fontane. Gerhart von Graevenitz, Rudolf Helmstetter, Manuela Günther, Roland Berbig, Daniela Gretz, Petra McGillen, Peer Trilcke, and Iwan-Michelangelo D’Aprile are important voices in this approach and have reframed previously dominant hermeneutic and biographical-historical approaches to Fontane and his texts. They focus less on the content and meaning of a given text and more on how Fontane’s texts function within and are products of the medial environment in which they emerged as well as on their relation to our medial world today.

1 Media and Advertising in Nineteenth-Century German Lands

The nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic increase in the amount and kinds of media and advertisements available to readers, an expansion in the number and type of those readers, a shift in control over those advertisements, and an increased commercialization of most forms of media.² At the beginning of the nineteenth century in Germany, most literature – specifically newspapers, and to some extent journals and books – was sold through subscription and was subject to oversight, if not ownership, of the government. The information gazettes (“Intelligenzblätter”) exemplify this shift; predecessors to the modern newspaper, they were owned or controlled mostly by authorities and served as both a revenue source and an official mouthpiece for them. In addition to essays on a wide range of subjects, they contained informational announcements about births, deaths, and marriages, notices about lost property and employment opportunities, and information about store opening hours and prices, as well as official notices by the authorities, all of which were uniform in format, design, and font. These gazettes became less popular as the nineteenth century progressed and were ultimately made obsolete in 1850 after legislation abolishing the Prussian state’s monopoly on advertising. This led to the spread of not only privately-owned newspapers, but also “Insertions-Agenturen” or “Annoncen-Expeditionen,” which were publicity agencies (private, not state-owned) that would mediate between newspapers and advertisers (Iurascu 2014, 248–249). The heavy reliance on advertising led to a shift away from subscriptions and to direct consumption.

This significant shift in newspaper media and advertising intensified in 1874, after German unification, with the repeal of legislation that heavily taxed newspaper advertising (Reuveni 2006, 123–124). This led not only to an increase in newspaper advertising – newspapers now had to rely more heavily on advertising as a source of revenue, and advertisements took up ever more space within a newspaper – but also to a change in the manner of advertising:

Beginning in the 1820s, both the nature and look of advertising started to change. At first it was still textual in nature, the main variables being the size and form of the letters. Then illustrations began to creep into advertisements, which beginning in the 1890s became colorful spectacles combining textual and above all complex visual elements. (Reuveni 2006, 124)

Although advertisements such as wedding announcements and personal ads continued in a generic format, commercial advertisements drove an increase in the number of ads and a dramatic shift towards visually appealing advertisements. As news-

² I rely on Gideon Reuveni’s summary of this historical shift and recommend his chapter, “From the Commercialization of Reading to Commercializing Reading” (2006, 97–146).

paper owners could rely less on subscriptions to sell papers, they had to rely on both visual appeal to attract consumers and advertisements to support their bottom line. Advertisements were thus crucial in creating demand for newspapers from an ever-increasing readership. As the proportion of advertisements in papers increased, it led to what Gideon Reuveni terms a “commercialization of reading,” so that “while the press played a key role in creating ‘the public sphere’ in the course of the eighteenth century, it played no less significant a role in the process of creating modern consumer culture as we know it from at least the last decade of the nineteenth century onward” (Reuveni 2006, 135). The result is that, as Petra S. McGillen writes, “Literature was literally pushed to the margins in the final third of the nineteenth century, as the amount of space dedicated to images within a given journal issue increased sharply” (McGillen 2019, 52).

German media at the end of the nineteenth century was thus in tension between newspaper and periodical reading, which critics often associated with commercialization and the creation of vast masses of faceless consumers, and book reading, which was associated with individual refinement and *Bildung*, the creation of an educated middle-class as the stabilizing force in society (Reuveni 2006, 139). One might also conceive of this as a tension between materialism on the one hand and aesthetics and idealism on the other. As McGillen writes:

The more pressure the periodical industry exerted on the aesthetic autonomy of literature, the more authors insisted on publicly upholding distinctions that the new realities of text production under industrialized conditions tore down: sophisticated literature versus light fiction, art versus craft, inspired writing versus scissors and glue (McGillen 2019, 11).

At the end of the nineteenth century these distinctions begin to blur. Fontane’s representation of advertising in his novels reflects this context and points to the larger historical shift from textual to visual advertisements and from literature associated with aesthetics and a *Bildungsideal* to literature as a consumer commodity, from idealism to materialism.

2 “Anzeigen” and Modern Narrative

The current article contributes to this medial analysis by building on previous scholarship on Fontane and media and offering a different perspective on the “Annoncen” or “Anzeigen” in Fontane’s novels. The “Anzeigen” in Fontane may indeed index the decline of the epistolary medium in favor of news media, as Iurascu rightly argues, but they serve other significant functions, as well. Whereas Iurascu highlights the conflation of “Annoncen” with “Briefe,” I see them in relation to Fontane’s narrative project at large. At first glance, it might appear that “Anzeigen” serve as a foil to his narratives – they are everything his narratives are not: brief, commercial, and void of nar-

rative subtlety. And in this regard Fontane employs the “Anzeige” as a modern foil to traditional narrative – it is an anti-narrative, for it conveys only facts, but not emotion, conflict, or experience. It exemplifies modern literature as defined by Walter Benjamin in his 1936/37 essay, “Der Erzähler.” In this essay, Benjamin sets modern forms of narrative against older narrative forms; he contrasts a bygone era of oral storytelling with the modern era of the printed novel. For Benjamin, the “Weisheit” and “Rat” contained in earlier oral narratives yield to the “Ratlosigkeit” of the modern novel, what Georg Lukács twenty years earlier had labeled “transcendental homelessness.” Benjamin asserts that: “Die Kunst des Erzählens neigt ihrem Ende zu, weil die epische Seite der Wahrheit, die Weisheit, ausstirbt” (Benjamin 1977, 442). The ascendancy of the modern world necessitates that new forms of narration and media will displace outdated ones. New notions of truth based in information replace those built on belief systems and ideals.

Benjamin’s essay has become canonical, although its usefulness for narrative theory is somewhat limited. For example, Rudolf Helmstetter asserts that

[d]ie kategorische Dichotomie ‘mündliche Tradition’ vs. ‘Schriftkultur,’ die Benjamins Bild des Erzählers zugrunde liegt, ist irreführend: Sie vermittelt ein ‘archaisches’ und nostalgisches Bild von den Geschicken und Bedingungen des Erzählens, das mit den mediengeschichtlichen Realitäten nicht zu vermitteln ist [...]. (Helmstetter 2008, 315–316)

Or, as Manuela Günter (2011, 167 n. 2) points out, Benjamin offers us heuristic tools rather than historically accurate description. Following Günter, I draw on Benjamin’s arguments not for their historical accuracy or precision as narratological terms, but for their heuristic value in contextualizing Fontane’s novels along a spectrum that is a useful conceptual framework but not a historically precise representation. This spectrum is less temporal and more genre based; it runs from what I label traditional narrative – what Benjamin associates with the “Erzähler” – to forms, such as the novel, which Benjamin associates with the “Neuzeit” and the rise of the bourgeoisie. On the more extreme end of this spectrum we find modern newspapers and advertisements that share information, but not wisdom.

Benjamin highlights a historical shift in medial form and content that resonates with the role of media in Fontane’s works. As modern narrative in its most extreme form, the “Anzeige” stands in opposition to traditional narrative. “Anzeigen” highlight the degree to which Fontane’s narratives differ from the more traditional narratives that Benjamin associates with the “Erzähler”: narratives associated with experience, narratives linked to ideals, and metanarratives that have disappeared in the modern novel. In addition, as visual objects, “Anzeigen” point to a defining feature of modernity as identified by Gerhart von Graevenitz. Graevenitz (2014) describes a fundamental aspect of modernization as “die Universalisierung und Globalisierung des Imaginären” (10), a consolidation of the imagination through the visual senses, primarily within new media formats, as well as arts, sciences, and politics from throughout the entire world (32). Graevenitz asserts “daß Fontane Bildformeln und Bildformen

benutzt, um an Anschauungen, Zeitbildern und Ängsten seiner Moderne die Verfaßtheit und die Wirkungen des kollektiven Imaginären zu zeigen“ (33). The “Anzeigen” in Fontane, particularly his reproduction of them within the text, represent this visual impulse that characterizes the collective imagination of modernity.

In this light, it is important that Fontane employs the term “Anzeige” most frequently to describe advertisements. Helen Barr gives us a definition of this term for the late nineteenth century:

Der eigentliche Wortsinn von *Anzeigen* kennzeichnet auch ihre ursprüngliche Funktion: In kurzen Texten, anfangs nur zurückhaltend bebildert und damit kaum von den redaktionellen Seiten zu unterscheiden, werden seit dem beginnenden 18. Jahrhundert Vergnügungsveranstaltungen, Familiennachrichten, Stellen- und Mietgesuche oder amtliche Bekanntmachungen *angezeigt*. [...] Frühe Geschäftsanzeigen zielen noch nicht auf Produktkonkurrenz, sondern kündigen lediglich sporadische Verkaufsaktionen an. (Barr 2016, 235–236)

For Fontane this term has the deictic function that Barr hints at – most literally, it points to something, “es zeigt.” In drawing our attention to something, it shares information without necessarily commenting on, comparing, or evaluating that information. As such, most “Anzeigen” in Fontane’s novels appear as announcements of significant events – most frequently marriages, deaths, and election results – with little or no commentary within the “Anzeige” itself. They are, as Barr describes, “Bekanntmachungen.” And in this regard, these “Anzeigen” align with Benjamin’s concept of modern narrative, which conveys information, but not “Rat” or “Weisheit.” One thinks of examples in *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, where we learn of both Botho and Käthe’s wedding and Lene and Gideon’s wedding through “Anzeigen”: “Ihre am gestrigen Tage stattgehabte eheliche Verbindung zeigen hierdurch ergebenst an Botho Freiherr von Rienäcker, Premierlieutenant im Kaiser-Kürassier Regiment, Käthe Freifrau von Rienäcker, geb. von Sellenthin” (GBA-Erz. Werk, vol. 10, 114), or „Ihre heute vollzogene eheliche Verbindung zeigen ergebenst an: *Gideon Franke*, Fabrikmeister, *Magdalene Franke*, geb. *Nimptsch*” (GBA-Erz. Werk, vol. 10, 190). A similar “Todesanzeige” is referenced in chapter 45 of *Der Stechlin*, although not printed out in full. But the function in each instance is the same – to convey important information such as marriages or deaths and the social rank of those involved, yet to avoid supporting details, context, or conflicts. The death announcements in Fontane indicate a more extended network of relationships than do the marriage announcements, but they, too, give only minimal insight into the complexities of these relationships. These “Anzeigen” convey information, but they offer neither context for nor evaluation of this information. This is a pointing, but not an elucidation or engagement.

The pointing or deictic nature of “Anzeigen” tells us something about Fontane’s use of the term. The term, “Anzeige,” is a deliberate choice on Fontane’s part. He might have used terms such as “Annonce” or “Meldung” that also denote conveying information. But Fontane uses “Meldung” almost exclusively for oral communication or for personal written dispatches. An informal word search reveals that he uses the

term “Annonce” with significantly less frequency than “Anzeige,” in some novels not at all, and never with more than half the frequency with which he uses “Anzeige.” So why is “Anzeige” Fontane’s preferred term for advertisements and announcements? One reason may be that the term “Anzeige” contains an implicit visual connotation that “Annonce” and “Meldung” do not. An “Anzeige” points to something, it shows more than it tells. The information it conveys is more visual than narrative. As Peter Borscheid notes, with the rise of the new newspaper format of the “Generalanzeiger” after 1871, “[b]ildliche Darstellungen und verzierte Umrahmungen kamen vermehrt in Mode. Der Informationsgehalt ging zurück, und die suggestive Qualität der Anzeige nahm zu” (cited in Barr 2016, 236). Fontane’s more frequent use of “Anzeige” over “Annonce” suggests that “Anzeigen,” for Fontane, point to the ascendance of visual over textual media, a conflict between image and text that took on new virulence in the modern era, as further examples will demonstrate. But first, it is important to understand how “Anzeigen” sustain Fontane’s narrative project.

3 “Anzeigen” and Supplementarity

“Anzeigen” are both a precondition of and an integral context for Fontane’s narratives. In his texts, “Anzeigen” stand in a relation of supplementarity, in Jacques Derrida’s sense, to traditional narrative. That is, whereas “Anzeigen” may seem incidental, even extraneous, to his narratives, they are in fact the very basis and life blood of his narratives, what makes them modern; they signal his belonging to a capitalist literary world. This is the context in which Fontane writes, a world based in information, not narrative, a world where news replaces storytelling. Iwan-Michelangelo D’Aprile (2018) asserts that Fontane’s novels are “Zeitungsromane” (*Newspaper Novels*), first and foremost for their use of newspaper advertisements, and also because they were written by a trained journalist and appeared first in serial media such as journals and newspapers (337–339). That is, the elements of consumer culture that we associate with newspaper advertisements reflect the content, production, and origin of Fontane’s novels. What at first might seem only incidental is, in fact, fundamental.

For Derrida, the supplement appears at first as an accessory, an apparently secondary creation that compensates for a lack in what is seen as essential or primary, such as writing would be to speech. Echoing Benjamin’s notion of spoken vs. written narrative, Derrida asserts that we tend to think of speech as primary, writing as secondary. Yet he argues that this relationship is not clearly defined, that speech in many cases presupposes and depends on writing. He does not simply invert the relationship between the two as much as he turns it into a relationship of unresolvable ambiguity, where it is unclear which element precedes the other. It is uncertain where the actual essence is (see Derrida 1974, 141–164). Derrida equates the supplement with “Differance” (150) and states that “Differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the

very thing that it makes impossible” (143). This seemingly contradictory relationship captures the conflict and tension that lies at the heart of Fontane’s prose, as embodied in his use of “Anzeigen.” His prose appears at first to belong to a narrative tradition of a bygone age when, in fact, it relies on modern media within a capitalist context. The result is thus, as McGillen describes it, not realism, but a reality effect (see McGillen 2019, 28–29). Writing about Rousseau, Derrida states that:

The supplement has not only the power of *procuring* an absent presence through its image; procuring it for us through the proxy of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it. For this presence is at the same time desired and feared. The supplement transgresses and at the same time respects the interdict (Derrida 1974, 155).

With “Anzeigen,” Fontane “procures” the “absent presence” of capitalism and consumerization, as signified in an advertisement. He keeps it at a safe narrative distance, marked as that which is different from traditional narrative, and in doing so, he both transgresses and respects traditional narrative. McGillen, in relation to Fontane, describes a similar pattern in nineteenth-century Realism as follows: “numerous late nineteenth-century writers attempted to restore their authority in the very media that threatened it and staged themselves as creative geniuses in the mass press” (McGillen 2019, 11). Fontane’s narrative appeals to the discourse of the creative genius championed by Romanticism, and at the same time it relies at an existential level on mass print consumer culture. This apparent contradiction is embodied in Fontane’s use of “Anzeigen.”

As much as “Anzeigen” might seem incidental and even antithetical to his narrative project, they are integral to it, a basis for it. D’Aprile attributes this in great part to Fontane’s professional background, both as an apothecary and a journalist:

Der auffällig häufige Gebrauch von Reklame in Fontanes Romanen ist kein Zufall: Seit den Anfängen der Zeitungsreklame im 18. Jahrhundert stammte der weitaus größte Anteil der Werbeannoncen von Apothekern, die hier ihre Gesundheits- und Schönheitsmittel anpriesen. Das Beobachten aktueller Marktentwicklungen und Trends war unabdingbarer Teil des Apothekerberufs. Und auch in seiner folgenden Journalistentätigkeit war der Anzeigenteil von Zeitungen, der seit dem Jahrhundertbeginn meist mehr als die Hälfte des Umfangs eines Blattes einnahm, für Fontane eine gleichwertige Informationsquelle neben den redaktionellen Nachrichten. (D’Aprile 2018, 28)

Out of professional necessity, Fontane would have been fluent in the language and media of advertisements in his era. His fluency in this medium infused his narratives.

Fontane thus sustains a tension in his work between an appearance of traditional narrative, where advertisements might seem out of place, and modern narrative, where they create “reality effects” that reflect the modern world. Both tendencies are evident in his work, but ultimately his work tends towards the latter, modern model of narrative.

4 “Anzeigen” and Traditional Narrative

From the perspective of traditional narrative, the “Anzeigen” in Fontane are best understood as a foil, an incongruous modern medial element in texts that otherwise exemplify the culmination of a long narrative tradition grounded in aesthetics and idealism. Fontane’s “Anzeigen” point to their own deficiency, creating a longing in readers for richness of narrative. They offer information, but they lack everything else that we would associate with narrative, including characterization, temporal development, tension and resolution, context and environment, aesthetic language, architectonic structure, and so on. The contrast between the deficiency of the kind of details that one would find in an “Anzeige” and what Realist narrative offers is evident in a letter of May/June 1897 that Fontane wrote to Adolf Hoffmann. Describing his novel, *Der Stechlin*, Fontane writes:

Aber die Geschichte, das was erzählt wird. Die Mache! Zum Schluß stirbt ein Alter und zwei Junge heiraten sich; – das ist so ziemlich alles, was auf 500 Seiten geschieht. Von Verwicklungen und Lösungen, von Herzenskonflikten oder Konflikten überhaupt, von Spannungen und Überraschungen findet sich nichts. (HFA, IV, vol. 4, 650)

Fontane doesn’t mention an “Anzeige” here, but he contrasts implicitly the information that one would expect in an “Anzeige” – a death or a marriage – with what one would expect of a narrative: complications and resolutions, romantic conflicts and conflicts in general, tensions and surprises, all within a larger metanarrative that provides wisdom and meaning. According to this description, *Der Stechlin* appears more like an “Anzeige” that shows only historically verifiable facts – marriage and death. A true narrator, however, shows details, complexities, tensions, and resolutions that these facts don’t reveal.

Fontane draws a distinction here that resonates with Benjamin’s “Erzähler” essay, that is the distinction between the perspective of the “Historiker” and the “Chronist”: „Der Historiker ist gehalten, die Vorfälle, mit denen er es zu tun hat, auf die eine oder andere Art zu erklären; er kann sich unter keinen Umständen damit begnügen, sie als Musterstücke des Weltlaufs herzuzeigen. Genau das aber tut der Chronist [...]” (Benjamin 1977, 451). The “Historiker” tells history separated from a metanarrative, whereas the “Chronist” contextualizes history within a larger “Weltlauf.” In the medieval period, this was a history of God’s plan of redemption. For Benjamin, the “Erzähler” is the profane perpetuation of the “Chronist,” one who preserves experience. In contrast, the “Anzeige” in Fontane is a genre void of all experiential detail, disconnected from any metanarrative. It contains names, dates, and official relationships, those things that a “Historiker” would convey. And according to Fontane, the plot of *Der Stechlin* lacks precisely those experiential details, those tensions and resolutions that a “Chronist” would emphasize. His exclamation, “Die Mache!”, suggests that a true narrative would contain these qualities, that it should avoid the poverty of a purely historical perspective that characterizes the “Anzeige.” Clearly, *Der Stechlin* contains

many of these elements but they do not occur on the level of the plot; instead, they have moved to the level of discourse and conversation. Thus, within the context of Fontane’s narratives, the “Anzeige” points to narrative deficiency – certainly on the level of plot – and contrasts with a narrative rich in experiential detail. The “Anzeige” becomes the battleground where modern narrative and pre-modern narrative clash.

5 Image and Text in Fontane’s “Anzeigen”

This contrast between modern capitalist narrative and nostalgia for an older narrative tradition is evident in the wide variety of “Anzeigen” that appear in Fontane’s novels. In particular, he highlights the visual quality of “Anzeigen” that appeals to the contemporary generation more than does traditional narrative. For example, in *Der Stechlin*, chapter 40, images appear on “Beilagen,” another term often associated with “Anzeigen.” Agnes, the embodiment of rising modernity, prefers the images, not the text, of these papers:

Wirklich, die „Landwirtschaftliche Zeitung“ lag am andern Morgen da, und Agnes war sehr glücklich, mal was andres zu haben als ihr Strickzeug und die schönen Bilder ansehen zu können. Denn es waren auch Schlösser drin und kleine Teiche, drauf Schwäne fuhren, und auf einem Bilde, das eine Beilage war, waren sogar Husaren. (GBA–Erz. Werk, vol. 17, 424)

Agnes enjoys the newspaper more than she does her “Strickzeug.” Although Agnes may be preliterate, weaving, knitting, and textile work have long been metaphors for creating narrative; she thus lays down the tools of narrative in favor of images. In a symbolic sense, Agnes’ preference for images over her “Strickzeug” reflects a preference for image over text.

Similarly, in chapter 31 of *Unwiederbringlich*, Holk reads the “Anzeigebeilage” of an English newspaper, the *Times*, and there learns of Ebba Rosenberg’s marriage. Even though this “Anzeige” contains only text, Fontane’s description of it focuses as much on its visual quality as on the information it conveys:

Neben ihm, auf einem leichten Rohrstuhl, lag die „Times“, die, weil das anmuthige Frühlingsbild vor ihm ihn bis dahin abgezogen hatte, heute, sehr ausnahmsweise, bei Seite geschoben war. Nun aber nahm er sie zur Hand und begann seine Lektüre wie gewöhnlich in der linken Ecke der großen Anzeigebeilage, wo, durch schärfste Diamantschrift ausgezeichnet, die Familiennachrichten aus dem Londoner High Life verzeichnet standen: geboren, gestorben, verheirathet. (GBA–Erz. Werk, vol. 13, 274)

The scene begins with a subtle battle for visual dominance – Holk is drawn away from his usual newspaper reading by “das anmuthige Frühlingsbild.” The visual attraction of nature draws him away from the text. When he finally returns to the text, the narrator draws our attention first to the font of the text he reads, the “Diamantschrift,” and

only after that to its content. It is as if the graphic form of the text, specifically of the letters, were more important than its words, syntax, or meaning. Here, as elsewhere, “Anzeigen” reenact the modern struggle between text and image, ultimately favoring the image.

This struggle reappears in modified form in an “Anzeige” in chapter 15 of *Die Poggenpuhls*, where the porter’s family reads aloud the funeral notice of Eberhard von Poggenpuhl. The visual layout of the “Anzeige” conflicts with both the information and its aural quality:

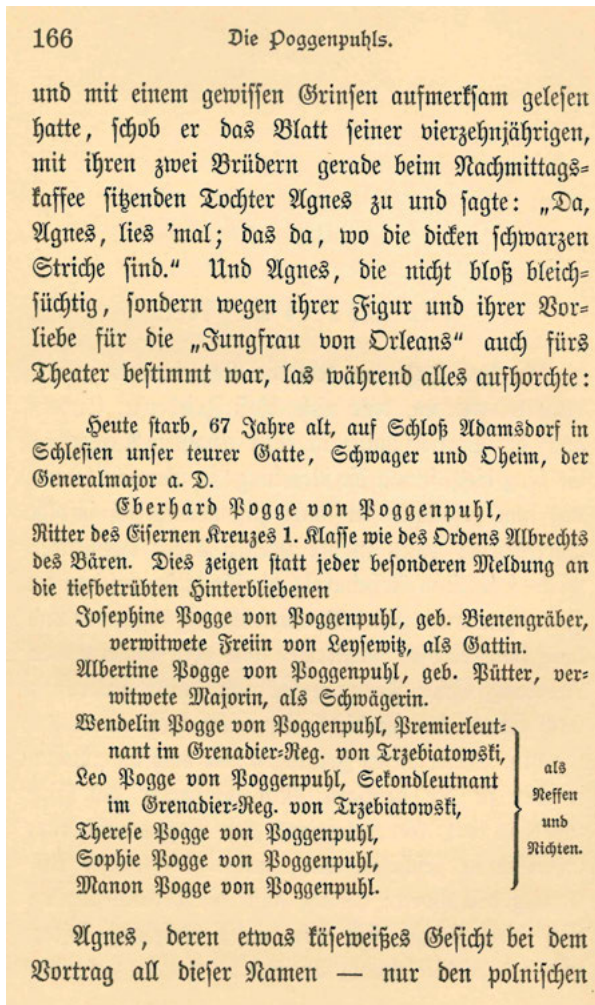


Fig. 1: Funeral notice of Eberhard von Poggenpuhl.

Nebelung, who only heard but did not see the “Todesanzeige,” responds: „Na, so was von Poggen; ich hör’ es ordentlich quaken“ (GBA-Erz. Werk, vol. 16, 115). Nebelung

misses the visual clues in the “Anzeige” – such as the visual grouping of the nephews and nieces as separate from other relatives of the deceased – and values only its aural quality – it sounds like the croaking of frogs. The aural quality erases all information and distinctions that the visual layout would emphasize such as the hierarchical relationship between the family members. Both the visual and the aural qualities of this “Anzeige” overshadow its textual content. Again, we see the “Anzeige” embody the conflict between visual and textual qualities, and here between aural and textual qualities, as well. This is a conflict between medium and message.

6 “Anzeigen” and Capitalism

In this regard, Fontane’s use of “Anzeigen” reflects Marshall McLuhan’s dictum, “the medium is the message” (1964, 7). For Fontane’s “Anzeigen” not only convey information such as births, deaths, and marriages, but they also represent a capitalist economic system – they promote products for commercial gain. These are advertisements for products, services, and places to visit. They are the medium that, perhaps more than any other, embodies modern capitalism.

In chapter 3 of *Unwiederbringlich*, we read how Gräfin Holk’s companion, Julie von Dobschütz, reads her an “Anzeige” from the newspaper:

Die Dobschütz [...] wandte die Zeitung und sah nun, daß es eine Annonce war, die, mit ihrem großen Holzschnitt in der Mitte, beinahe die ganze Rückseite der Zeitung einnahm. Das Auge der Dobschütz glitt darüber hin. Dann sagte sie: „Es ist eine Pensionsanzeige aus der Schweiz, natürlich vom Genfersee; hier, das kleine Gebäude, ist das Pensionat, und das große Hotel im Vordergrund ist nur Zugabe.“ (GBA–Erz. Werk, vol. 13, 25)

The visual quality of this “Annonce,” its “Holzschnitt,” supports its commercial purpose, to advertise for a pension in Switzerland. And the size of the “Annonce” – it takes up almost all of the last page – points to the increasing dominance of image over text. Fontane underscores its rich visual quality with the statement “das große Hotel im Vordergrund ist nur Zugabe” – it is an inessential visual embellishment. The visual richness only enhances Gräfin Holk’s enthusiasm for the religious inclination of this pension, but it is difficult to separate her religious enthusiasm from the fact that this advertisement not only conveys information, but also attempts to sell something. “Anzeigen” embody the rise of commodity capitalism. We see this again in *Effi Briest*, in chapter 30, just before Effi learns of Innstetten’s decision to abandon her. Her mother’s letter, which conveys Innstetten’s intentions and includes “Geldscheine” from her father, accompanies “mehrere Zeitungen, [und] zwei Friseuranzeigen.” Effi signs for the delivery, but the narrator notes that “Die Zwicker aber überflog die Friseuranzeigen und lachte über die Preisermäßigung von Shampooing” (GBA–Erz. Werk, vol. 15, 299). The “Friseuranzeigen” turn women’s appearance into a commodity. The “Preis-

ermäßigung” suggests that this commodity has lost value, forecasting Effi’s loss of marital status and accompanying loss of value in the social economy, as indicated by her father’s financial subsidy. The “Anzeigen” in this instance point to the ever-increasing commodification of society and relationships in the modern world, reinforcing the main action of the novel. “Anzeigen” in Fontane thus point to the ascendance of commercialism and materialism that accompanies the rise of bourgeois culture in late nineteenth-century Germany. “Anzeigen” contextualize Fontane’s narratives within an increasingly commercial society.

7 “Anzeigen” as Fundamental to Fontane’s Narratives

Readers might then ask if Fontane is writing against commercialism or in support of it. One might argue that “Anzeigen” indeed represent the increasing commercialization in society but as negative examples; Fontane’s narratives serve as an alternative, even as an antidote to such commercialism. After all, his texts provide the experiential details, the conflicts, and the aesthetic form that “Anzeigen” lack; “Anzeigen” represent everything that his narratives aren’t. Where “Anzeigen” convey information without context, comment, or temporality, Fontane’s narratives indulge in context, dialogue, and temporal references, despite what he might claim about *Der Stechlin*. To approach this from Benjamin’s perspective, “Anzeigen” embody a new kind of writing that is patently lacking, that is deficient. “Anzeigen” lack meaningful “content,” for they provide only names, dates, and information, but not the sense of experience to which Benjamin appeals. Insofar as “Anzeigen” interrupt Fontane’s texts, as Iurascu highlights, he indeed employs them as apparent antitheses to his realist practice. Their presence initially suggests to the reader that Fontane’s narratives offer richer narrative than “Anzeigen” can. Their own lack of narrative lends authority to his narratives, simply by virtue of contrast.

Yet a closer analysis suggests that these “Anzeigen” are more than a foil for Fontane’s narratives, more than just interruptions. Instead, they are an integral part of his narrative endeavor, even a precondition for it. They are an essential part of what makes Fontane modern, for they point not to an idealist or even pre-modern view of reality, subsumed under a metanarrative such as God, *Geist*, or an ideal, but to a modern view of reality as composed of various reality effects within a modern materialist, capitalist culture. This realization leads to the question that many Fontane scholars have faced: how do we reconcile the nostalgic Fontane associated with older narrative traditions with the modern Fontane who is keenly aware and critical of modern capitalism at the same time he profits from it? Günter (2008, 210) confronts this question by characterizing Fontane as a “mediales Chamäleon,” one who is so well integrated into the mass-media landscape of his age that he can manipulate it

to support conflicting political views.³ The ambiguity and uncertainty in Günter’s notion of a chameleon point to another figure that describes the relationship between “Anzeigen” and narrative in Fontane, namely supplementarity. I return here to Derrida’s term because it points to the self-contradictory nature of “Anzeigen” in Fontane, to their uncertain status between anti-narrative and modern narrative. Where “Anzeigen” seem incidental and even antithetical to Fontane’s narrative project, they are actually integral to it. Where some Fontane scholarship may emphasize aesthetics over capitalism, Fontane’s repeated use of “Anzeigen” compels us to recognize that materialist concerns were a significant force in his literary production. This creates a more complex understanding of Fontane as an author focused not only on aesthetic criteria, but also on a capitalist literary market. Helmstetter (1998, 33) identifies this tension in his works: “Fontane entwickelt eine Publikationspraxis, die es ihm ermöglicht, zugleich kommerziellen und ästhetischen Kriterien zu genügen.” McGillen (2019) describes this as a „realism of the middle,” balancing straightforward entertainment with self-reflexive, artful qualities (256), likewise identifying the tension between market and aesthetics that permeates Fontane’s work. His much-touted term, “Läuterung,” thus becomes not a practice of aesthetically mediating given reality, but instead of aesthetically mediating an already-mediated reality (McGillen 2019, 104), in this case a medial one.

In this context, “Anzeigen” play an integral role in his texts; they are narrative supplements for Fontane in regard to both the origin and the medium of the narrative. Regarding the origin of narratives, we know that “Anzeigen” or “Anzeige”-like information often provided Fontane the “Erzählstoff” for his narratives, as in the Ardenne affair for *Effi Briest* or the Karl von Maltzahn affair for *Unwiederbringlich*. We see “Anzeigen” spawning narratives at multiple points in the *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*, where they provide Fontane the occasion for extensive narrative exposition. For example, Fontane cites the “Todesanzeige” of Mathilde von Rohr:

In ihrer Nummer vom 19. September 1889 brachte die „Kreuzzeitung“ folgende Anzeige:
„Am 16. September, 11 Uhr vormittags, verschied nach langem, schwerem Leiden im 80. Lebensjahr unsere geliebte Tante, Großtante und Schwägerin

Fräulein Mathilde von Rohr

aus dem Hause Trieplatz,

Conventualin zu Kloster Dobbertin.

Im Namen der Hinterbliebenen Christian von Rohr, Hauptmann u. Kompaniechef im 3. G.-Gr.-Reg. Königin Elisabeth.“

Das alte Fräulein hatte ich das Glück zu kennen, und von ihr und der guten alten Zeit, die wenigstens dann und wann eine wirklich gute alte Zeit war, will ich in nachstehendem erzählen. (GBA-Wanderungen, Bd. 6, 106)

³ Similarly, Helmstetter describes Fontane as “keine positive gegebene Einheit, sondern eine plurale Differenz, ein kooperatives Bündel verschiedener Autor-Rollen und diskursiver Funktionen [...]” (Helmstetter 1998, 14)

A first-person narrative ensues, marking a shift from the more impersonal, factual format of the “Anzeige” to the personal recollections of the narrator. Fontane could have offered his readers a narration of Mathilde von Rohr without the “Todesanzeige,” but here, as in many other places in the *Wanderungen*, the “Anzeige” provides not only an introduction, but also an inducement to narration. It grounds his narrative in historical fact, in the reality of the *Kreuzzeitung*. And his narrative supplements the “Anzeige” with what it lacks. In implying that the “Anzeige” lacks crucial, personal information, he likewise intimates that the subsequent narrative would not exist without the “Anzeige.” The narrative depends on the “Anzeige” as much as the “Anzeige” depends on the narrative. In terms of the supplement, it becomes unclear whether the narrative is the supplement to the “Anzeige,” or the “Anzeige” the supplement to the narrative. Which compensates for the lack in the other?

Not only the content of “Anzeigen,” but also the visual qualities of “Anzeigen” generate narrative, pointing again to the significance of visual and material culture. In chapter 3 of “Liebenberg” in *Fünf Schlösser*, the narrator quotes the “alte[n] Freiherr[n]”:

Etwas Sonderbareres als die Todesanzeige, die mir der Freiherr von Loë nach dem Ableben seiner Frau zugeschickt hat, hab ich lange nicht in Händen gehabt. Der Druck der Annonce (fast in Mönchsschrift) ist absurde, der Inhalt noch absurder. Die Titulaturen passen nur auf die Eitelkeit dieses Herrn und stellen ein Machwerk her, wie man's in unsern Zeiten nicht mehr erwarten sollte. Vielleicht hat Herr Geheimrat Focke auch so ein Unding bekommen. Befrag ihn doch, mit bestem Gruße von mir, ob man darauf antworten müsse? Sagt er ‚ja‘, so könnt ich vielleicht anfangen: Le Sieur de Hertefeld, ni Sénateur, ni Comte, ni Chevalier, ni Grand Croix, a vu avec douleur etc. (GBA-Wanderungen, Bd. 5, 256–257)

Fontane's narrator criticizes the formalities in this death announcement as well as its font (“fast in Mönchsschrift”), suggesting that the visual qualities of the “Anzeige” are an important correlate to its content. They motivate him to muse on the ridiculousness of the “Anzeige” itself so that the visual qualities of an “Anzeige” generate narrative. Fontane's prose in general and his novels in particular can be read as expositions on “Anzeigen.”

But “Anzeigen” serve not only as an origin-like impulse for his narratives. They are also, in many regards, a medium for his narratives. Fontane's novels appeared in serial form, in journals that would have included “Anzeigen” or had “Beilagen” of “Anzeigen.” It is difficult to imagine that Fontane could have conceived of his texts as somehow separate from this visual, material, and materialist culture. As Helmstetter asserts, “Fontane war ein markt- und publikumsbewußter Planer, Verwalter und Verwerter seiner literarischen Produktion. Er hat zwar nicht auf den ‘großen Erfolg’ spekuliert, mußte aber seine literarischen Ansprüche mit den Erwartungen des Publikums vermitteln.” (Helmstetter 1998, 26) And Günter, analyzing Fontane's “Frauenromane,” argues “dass sich Fontane mit seiner Individualität doch ganz gezielt auf den Markt einstellte.” (Günter 2008, 213) As others have demonstrated, his texts were part of a material print culture where reading and advertising were closely intertwined. To

view his texts as separate from this capitalist, commercialist culture, is to overlook one of their most fundamental features. As much as they are aesthetic creations, they are also commodities demanding their place in a market of supply and demand.

8 Conclusion

“Anzeigen” embody the conflict and ambiguity at the heart of Fontane’s narratives. On the one hand, readers encounter in advertisements a type of foil, a nod to traditional narrative that would convey experience through aesthetic means, a longing for lost meta-narratives that create meaning and transcend the specificity of information grounded in immediate material culture. Advertisements point to what has disappeared in modern narrative. On the other hand, advertisements convey a different kind of narrative: information that is immediate, a product of and response to the modern capitalist culture in which they emerge. They exemplify the ascendance of visual over textual media that characterizes modernization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The tension between these two modes in Fontane, as evidenced in his use of “Anzeigen,” points to his self-awareness of the conflicted role of the author within modern commodity capitalism. The contemporary author must balance the demands of aesthetics with the demands of the market. Fontane is thus both a virtuosic champion of traditional aesthetic narrative and a clear-eyed collaborator with the capitalist literary market.⁴

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⁴ Thanks to Brian Tucker for valuable input on this article.

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Fig. 1

Description: Funeral notice of Eberhard von Poggenpuhl

Source: Theodor Fontane: *Die Poggenpuhls*. Roman. Berlin: F. Fontane & Co. 1896, S. 166.

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