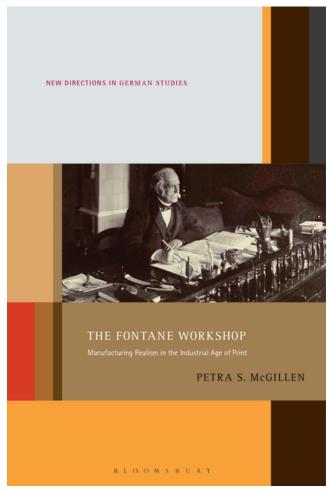# Book Summary and Chapter Abstracts

Petra S. McGillen: *The Fontane Workshop: Manufacturing Realism in the Industrial Age of Print*. New Directions in German Studies; 26. New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
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In the second half of the nineteenth century, the advent of industrialized printing technology transformed the conditions of literary production in Germany. Authors confronted a marketplace newly dominated by periodicals, the first modern mass media. Established accounts describe the relationship between literary writing and the mass press in terms of creative constraints and a loss of aesthetic autonomy. Petra McGillen's analysis of the creative process of the great German realist Theodor Fontane challenges this narrative. Exploring Fontane's notebooks and other little-known archival materials, McGillen demonstrates that in response to the industrialization of print, Fontane developed a new mode of creativity: he ran a "workshop" to assemble journalistic writings and prose works from a reservoir of textual snippets and imagery that the author and his helpers culled from the mass press.

With an innovative approach that combines material media theory, media history, and literary poetics, McGillen historicizes this form of authorship, arguing that Fontane's composition practices continued the early-modern tradition of compiling and anticipated modern methods of remix. Comparing Fontane's practices to those of Keller, Raabe, and Dickens, she concludes that Fontane's "workshop" resulted in two innovations: a realism that was a media effect, produced with textual and visual materials that the author sampled and remixed on an unprecedented scale, and a model of authorship that reconciled literary writing with mass production. McGillen thus provides not only the first in-depth study of Fontane's notebooks but also a new understanding of German realism as a period of innovative textual practices.

Introduction: Remediating Copy and Paste

Analyzing the discrepancy between Theodor Fontane's authorial self-portrait as an inspired writer and his material textual practices, the introduction argues that Fontane was in fact a compiler who plundered myriad sources and pieced his writings together with scissors and glue. While compiling as a mode of authorship had declined in status in Romanticism, Fontane adapted this early-modern practice to the mass media marketplace of his time. The assembly of texts in the Fontane workshop, the introduction shows, did not entail a loss of aesthetic autonomy but rather creative strategies that anticipated contemporary remix culture. An examination of Fontane's notebooks and other material media demonstrates that German literary realism was a period of innovative textual practices. To this end, the introduction offers a substantial methodological reflection on how to reconstruct historical creative processes and analyze notebooks in light of material media theory, providing a theoretical primer for future notebook studies.

One. One Media-Historical Coordinates: Literature in the Industrial Age of Print

This chapter situates Fontane's compilatory enterprise in the media landscape of the late nineteenth century. Taking its cue from a well-informed satire, Hauff's "Die Bücher und die Lesewelt," the chapter provides a historical and systematic account of the complex relationship between mass media and literary production. It shows how the evolution of the periodical industry created conditions of fragmented textuality and saturation that put pressure on literary autonomy, causing writers such as von Droste-Hülshoff, Keller, and Raabe to turn away from mass media. For a compiler like Fontane, however, these conditions proved stimulating and led to a different perception of the period: whereas many of his colleagues felt like mere epigones, Fontane interpreted the cultural climate of epigonality as a liberation from tradition and as a license to exploit and remix the overabundance of existing textual sources in new and original ways.

Two. Biography vs. Autobiography: The Making of a Compiler

This chapter reconstructs how Fontane became a compiler. It follows Fontane to the sites where he trained for his first two careers, the pharmacy and the newsroom, arguing that Fontane internalized practices of mixing, storing, cutting, and pasting at these sites that were foundational to his compiling. Focusing on his "unechte Korrespondenzen" (false foreign correspondences), newspaper articles that pretended to be correspondents' letters but were actually assembled at the Berlin newsroom of the *Kreuzzeitung*, the chapter demonstrates how Fontane pieced together reports from previously published sources and dressed them up so that they seemed realist to readers. The "media realism" that Fontane practiced as a journalist carried over into his literary realism. The chapter traces practices of copy and paste in the working methods of hack writers, to which Fontane is briefly compared, and discusses how he attempted to hide his compilatory activities in his autobiography, *Von Zwanzig bis Dreißig*.

Three. A Living Archive: Generating Input

This chapter analyzes the origins of the material archive on which Fontane's authorship rested. It argues that two "crowdsourcing" devices—amateur collecting and the Prussian post—facilitated the rapid growth of Fontane's archive. Branding his long-term literary project, *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*, a "collection" in need of completion, Fontane incentivized readers to send him material and thus obtained thousands of pages of text for future writing projects. Fontane also deployed the Prussian post, turning his social network into a postal lending library, and requesting sources from acquaintances. The chapter discusses the storage media with which Fontane tried to manage a constant influx of material. In contrast to the systematic archives of Goethe and Raabe, Fontane's assemblage of slips, notebooks, and boxes remained a fluid contact zone between the media landscape and his output, a quality that had significant implications for his authorship and modes of productivity.

Four. The Manufacture of Literature: Generating Output

This chapter analyzes Fontane's poetics of production by tracing the interaction between his writing tools, forms of notation, and the media landscape. Fontane drafted his prose works "backwards," starting with the aesthetic effect. Using lists and slips, he recombined materials culled from the mass press and hybridized popular media forms (genre images, discursive sound samples) to produce effects of verisimilitude. Analyzing the early working notes for *Vor dem Sturm* and *Schach von Wuthenow*, the chapter compares Fontane's nonlinear mode of production to Dickens's drafting of novels with the help of "number plans." Whereas Dickens planned effects from installment to installment, Fontane's practice culminated in the production of whole novels in which each element—from symbolism to protagonists' speaking styles—could be adjusted separately, resulting in a realism that was a calculated, total aesthetic effect. Fontane's authorship thus reconciled the "manufacture" of literature with the creation of genuine works of art.

Coda: The "Uncreative" Writing of *Mathilde Möhring*

A reading of Fontane's unfinished novel *Mathilde Möhring* (1891/96), this chapter argues that the novel provides an ironic reflection of the ambivalent status of compiling. The novel's title character, a woman from Berlin's lower stratum, appears as a figurative compiler who embodies several of Fontane's working methods. While successful in her textual strategies, Mathilde remains a coldly calculating character, and the reader develops little appreciation for her skills. The novel as a whole, however, is a display of finesse and calculated effects. Reusing central topics from Fontane's previous production such as *Effi Briest* in self-aware fashion, *Mathilde Möhring* turns into art precisely the kind of calculation that the title character executes prosaically, and evinces the creativity of compiling as one of Fontane's central textual strategies. The chapter concludes by arguing that, in light of Fontane's working methods, nineteenth-century German realism should be understood as an era of innovative textual practices.