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**Editing a Discourse, Not a Text: Meta-Methodological Remarks
on an Editorial Endeavour
(Abstract)**

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Whereas in literary studies poststructuralist theory (e. g. deconstruction, discourse analysis, broad concepts of intertextuality, ›Death of the Author‹-claims and several versions of anti-intentionalism) has had – and still has – a massive impact on practices of *interpretation*, until now there has been very little reception of according ideas in the domain of scholarly editing. Here, emphatic criticism regarding the ›author-centricity‹ of textual scholarship rather employed concepts like ›textual dynamics‹ or ›textual fluidity‹, as well as a positivist focus on the ›materiality‹ of singular documents.

However, within my contribution I will outline an entirely different approach by asking the question: If we actually decided to give up on author-centricity in scholarly editing and radically rejected authors' intentions as well as authors' single or collected works as objects of textual scholarship, could the yet unrealized project of ›editing a discourse‹ or ›discourse edition‹ work as a complement, an extension, or a replacement of traditional editions?

To make this clear: So far there is no such thing as a discourse edition, so I cannot give a *description* of something already in existence. Actually, I don't want to *make a case* for discourse editions either, that is, my contribution will *not* contain any programmatic or normative claims and I will *not* suggest a concrete editorial concept. Instead, I will explore what questions and problems someone would be confronted with when seriously conceptualizing and/or realizing such a project. So, generally my presentation takes the shape of a *heuristic* (partly *critical*) thought experiment: the answer to a what-if-question.

One of the underlying ideas of this article is to confront contemporary edition philology (textual scholarship) – which is oriented towards categories like author, work, or text – with a ›foil‹ for contrast specifically invented for the purpose to show quite plainly that those leading categories scholarly editorial work is based on are anything but self-evident and without any alternatives but in the end rather contingent (namely upon *pragmatic* considerations regarding research interests and overall aims of textual scholarship). Radically different modes of editing are imaginable and an editorial practice that is interested in asking different questions and pursuing different objectives would undoubtedly look very unlike what is the common practice and rationale of contemporary scholarly editing.

I designed a meta-philological thought experiment to exemplify exactly this and I will thereby reveal a discipline-specific methodological ›blindness‹, irritate seemingly unproblematic habitual ways of thinking and thus uncover a deficit of reasoning and self-reflection in the field. Basically, I will clarify some implicit (categorical and methodological) presuppositions of scholarly editing and thereby uncover some aspects of the (invisible) normative framework underlying editorial practices.

Firstly, I will clarify *what* entities could be meant by the term ›discourse‹ – focussing especially on French poststructuralism (namely Michel Foucault) – in order to establish the very *object* of a discourse edition.

Secondly, I will ask *why* – for what reasons and purposes – one should engage in such an enterprise at all: Why should one favour it over conventional editions? Would discourse editions be complementary to or an extension of alternative editorial options, or would they be their replacement?

When I will have shown that a discourse edition can actually be *justified* as a *reasonable* editorial project, I will move on to the question of *how* such an edition might look like. Hence, I will distinguish three versions of *how to conceptualize* a discourse edition – a weak, a strong, and a radical version – each of which can be conceived as a complement, an extension, or a replacement of traditional editions: The *weak* version still focuses on author's single or collected works but also tries to reconstruct them as ›hubs‹ within historical discourse networks, e. g. by adding extensive commentaries, contexts and source material. The *strong* version comes closest to Foucault's programmatic ideas but also faces difficult questions, such as whether texts, parts of texts or statements are to be considered as the elementary units of a discourse edition, how exactly the quantity of editorially recorded objects is to be limited, and how different discourses are to be differentiated. The *radical* version – which turns out to be a *prescriptive* theoretical fiction – gives up not only on categories like ›author‹, ›work‹, etc. but also dispenses with pretty much any other concept of order exceeding ›free-floating‹ single statements, anonymous, and decontextualized.

Finally, I will briefly consider the question of *how to practically realize* the strong version of a discourse edition.

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