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Banishing Dissemination : Habermas and Gadamer Against Derrida

The purpose of this paper is to understand the difference between hermeneutics and deconstruction through the criticism leveled against Derrida by Habermas and Gadamer. My argument is that despite their differences, Gadamer and Habermas share several presuppositions in their criticism of Derrida's work. In his evaluation of Derrida in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Habermas isolates literature as a self-sufficient, self-present whole, ignores the materiality of language and underestimates the 'parasitical' uses of language in everyday life. In order to justify his decisions, he interestingly refers to Gadamer's hermeneutics. A similar operation can also be detected in Gadamer's contribution to the colloquium on deconstruction and hermeneutics. Gadamer himself, however, is more careful than Habermas in his analysis of Derrida's philosophy. He notes how Heideggerian philosophy could only give rise to two different 'trends' later, one represented by Derrida, and the other by himself. In this detection of common roots, he attempts to establish a ground for communication between deconstruction and hermeneutics. But in justifying his differences from Derrida, he seems to have presuppositions similar to those of Habermas. In his paper titled "Text and Interpretation" Gadamer separates literary discourse from other types of discourse and wards off discourses in everyday speech ('antitexts', 'paratexts' and 'countertexts', as he names them) which do undermine the possibility of communication. After having carefully elucidated the arguments of both philosophers, I pass on to Derrida to argue that his conception of writing as outlined in his *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology* reveals the shortcomings of hermeneutics. Both Habermas and Gadamer fail to understand that Derrida's notion of writing aims at disrupting the ontology of the work of art that they take for granted.

