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# How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup>

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How can an interpretive theory gain legitimacy in two cultural markets as different as France and the United States? This study examines the intellectual, cultural, institutional, and social conditions of legitimation of Jacques Derrida's work in the two countries and develops hypotheses about the process of legitimation of interpretive theories. The legitimation of Derrida's work resulted from a fit between it and highly structured cultural and institutional systems. In France, Derrida capitalized on the structure of the intellectual market by targeting his work to a large cultural public rather than to a shrinking group of academic philosophers. His work appealed to the intellectual public as a status symbol and as a novel and sophisticated way to deal with late 1960s politics. In the United States, Derrida and a group of prestigious literary critics reframed his theory and disseminated it in university departments of literature. His work was imported concurrently with the work of other French scholars with whom he shared a market. Derrida's support is more concentrated and stronger in one discipline than the support for other French intellectuals. In America, professional institutions and journals played a central role in the diffusion of his work, while cultural media were more central in France.

Sometime in the early 1970s we awoke from the dogmatic slumber of our phenomenological sleep to find that a new presence had taken absolute hold over our avant-garde critical imagination: Jacques Derrida. . . . The shift to post-

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structuralist direction and polemic in the intellectual careers of Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, Edward Said and Joseph Riddel—all of whom were fascinated in the 1960s by strains of phenomenology—tells the whole story. In the space of five or six years, Derrida had arrived; had attracted some extraordinarily committed and gifted students on both coasts; had spawned two new journals . . . , both of which, in spite of their youth, have achieved remarkable visibility and attention. [LENTRICCHIA 1980, p. 159]

The successful introduction of Jacques Derrida's work to American literary criticism raises interesting sociological questions. The evaluation of cultural goods is highly dependent on contextual cultural norms. How then does a cultural good gain legitimacy in two cultural markets as different as France and the United States? Or, How can a French philosopher gain acceptance in the land of empiricism? More generally, what are the conditions under which a cultural product becomes defined as important? This paper analyzes the cultural, institutional, and social conditions of interpretive theories by analyzing the legitimation of Jacques Derrida's work in France and the United States.

In the sociology of science, several areas of research are concerned directly or indirectly with understanding the process of the legitimation of theories. Studies have focused on scientific innovation, paradigm shifts, communication, diffusion, scientific productivity, and the evaluation, stratification, and attribution of reward processes in science. These works deal almost exclusively with theories in the empirical sciences. Studies of interpretive fields are mostly historical case studies not concerned with intellectual legitimation per se (e.g., Radnitsky 1973; Janik and Toulman 1973; Jay 1973; Kuklick 1977; Axelrod 1979). Others analyze the interpretation and reception of work from a semiotic or historical perspective (Jauss 1982; Chartier 1982). The sociological study of the legitimation of philosophical, historical, and literary theories has been almost completely neglected (but see Turkle 1978; Simonton 1976; Amsterdamska 1985). A separate consideration of nonempirical theories is in order.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> While important recent French work in the sociology of knowledge has discussed aspects of legitimation in the scientific, literary, and artistic fields (e.g., Bourdieu 1983, 1986; Charles 1983; Fabiani 1983; Karady 1979; Pinto 1984; and Pollack 1979), these contributions do not attempt to develop an explicit and systematic theory of the process of legitimation of interpretive theories. Nor do they address the issue of the legitimation of interpretive theories in different environments. Their primary focus is on analyzing the social determination of cultural products, looking at topics such as the habitus of the producer and the audience, the structure of the "field," similarities of position takings among agents who occupy similar positions, etc. (Bourdieu 1971, pp. 12–18). I will draw on some of their suggestions to study the legitimation of interpretive theories.

The first objective of this study is to develop hypotheses about the process of legitimation of interpretive theories by examining the case of Jacques Derrida's work. Intellectual legitimation is defined as the process by which a theory becomes recognized as a part of a field—as something that cannot be ignored by those who define themselves, and are defined, as legitimate participants in the construction of a cognitive field.<sup>3</sup> I contend that the legitimation of interpretive theories does not proceed from their intrinsic value but results from coexisting, highly structured inter-related cultural and institutional systems. I also argue that legitimation results from two distinct but simultaneous processes: (1) the process by which the producer defines himself and his theory as important, legitimizing and institutionalizing this claim by producing work meeting certain academic requirements, by making explicit his contribution to a cognitive field, and by creating research teams, research institutes, journals, and so forth; and (2) the process through which, first, peers and, second, the intellectual public define and assess a theory and its producer as important and, by doing so, participate in the construction of the theory and the institutionalization of that theory and its author. This suggests that cultural markets are not unified markets but that they are segmented by definitions of good work.

The second objective is to understand how an interpretive theory may become legitimized among various audiences whose norms of evaluation differ. Several authors have noticed and criticized the transformations of theories introduced into new cultural milieus (e.g., Cardoso 1977; Janik and Toulman 1973). I argue that the intellectual legitimation of a theory in different settings depends on its *adaptability* to specific environmental requirements, which permits a fit between the work and specific cultural and institutional features of various markets. I show that the legitimation of Derrida's work in the United States was made possible by its adaptation to existing intellectual agenda and by a shift in public from a general audience to a specialized literary one. Also, Derrida benefited from the concurrent importation of a number of other French authors, which created an American market for French interpretive theories.

I proceed by reconstructing the intellectual, cultural, institutional, and social conditions of the intellectual legitimation of Derrida's work. These conditions refer to (1) the construction, assessment, and institutionalization of deconstruction theory as an important theory by Derrida, his peers, and the intellectual public and (2) the structured cultural and institutional system of environmental constraints on the construction pro-

<sup>3</sup> This definition is different from Bourdieu's (1969, p. 103) analysis of legitimacy in that I emphasize the public's recognition of a work, independent of its value. For Bourdieu, legitimacy is the affirmation of the position of the work.



cess, that is, the rules of the game, the structural requirements that Derrida's work and personal trajectory had to meet in order for his theory to be defined as important. I identify these requirements by comparing the work and trajectories of a representative sample of renowned French philosophers.<sup>4</sup> I also analyze the context in which these philosophers were legitimized and in which their work was framed. The attributes of these intellectuals define what a legitimate French intellectual is and what characteristics one has to have in order to be considered a member of that group. A more systematic analysis of these requirements, and especially of the effects of the market structure on the opportunity and reward structure, would require further study.

The first part of my discussion briefly presents the central elements of Derrida's theory. I identify aspects of his work that are necessary conditions for its intellectual legitimation, given the Parisian intellectual and institutional context of the 1960s. Here, the focus is on the fit between Derrida's work and an existing, highly structured cultural system and on analyzing the features of Derrida's intellectual work that contributed to its diffusion, such as his writing style. The second part contends that intellectual legitimation depends on institutional supports, that the access to institutional supports depends on intellectual collaboration, and that cultural capital has an important role in either blocking or facilitating access to intellectual circles and institutions that affect the institutionalization process. I argue that Derrida capitalized on the structure of the intellectual market by directing his work to several already constituted publics rather than to a shrinking philosophy public and that cultural media had a central role in disseminating Derrida's work to a large public. The third part discusses the legitimation of Derrida's work in the United States. The conditions of importation of Derrida's theory are identified, especially its adaptation to the theoretical debates in American literary criticism, its incorporation into the work of well-established scholars, and its diffusion through prestigious academic institutions. I focus on the fit between Derrida's work and distinctive features of the American market. I argue that a shift in public was essential to Derrida's

<sup>4</sup> This sample was constructed by using the elite identification technique (Kadushin 1974). In the summer of 1980, I asked 10 important French philosophers and five journalists and editors of major intellectual journals to list the 10 most important contemporary French philosophers. The results were very similar to those obtained by Descombes (1980), who used the same method. Montefiore's (1983) sample of French philosophers is also very similar. I conducted interviews with several of these philosophers to collect data on their intellectual and institutional trajectories. I also used various secondary sources and bibliographies in order to supplement this information (see App.). The list included Louis Althusser, Jean Baudrillard, François Châtelet, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul Ricoeur, and Michel Serres.

success in the United States, and that professional institutions and journals played a central role in the diffusion of his ideas, whereas in France cultural media were more important. I also argue that Derrida's support is concentrated in literature departments and is exceptionally strong, in contrast to that for other French intellectuals, such as Foucault, whose support is more spread out.<sup>5</sup>

My analysis is based on biographical information, on recent work on the history of contemporary literary criticism and philosophy, and on the literature on the sociology of French intellectuals. Supplementary data on Derrida and other intellectuals were collected during interviews in 1980 and 1984 with French and American philosophers and literary critics and with individuals involved in the diffusion of intellectual products in France (e.g., journalists and editors). A bibliographical source on structuralism (Miller 1981) was used to identify the diffusion curves of Derrida's work.

#### DERRIDA'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A good first step might be that very combination of exasperation and insight which we feel when we grasp that any attempt to give an account of what Derrida says is a falsification of his project, but that such falsification is unavoidable. [CULLER 1975, p. 156]

In order to understand the nexus of Derrida's theory and its intellectual environment, it is necessary to consider the main arguments of Derrida's work.<sup>6</sup> I argue that certain features of Derrida's work, such as its writing style, facilitated its diffusion in French intellectual circles, fitted extant

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Bourdieu and colleagues' work on cultural legitimacy also focuses on legitimacy as the product of networks of relations. However, they have a very specific conception of networks as "fields," where, similar to de Saussure's conception of systems of signs, the value and meaning of each element (cultural producers, works, aesthetic and political position takings, institutions) is defined relationally. E.g., "[Every position taking] receives its distinctive value from its negative relationship with the coexisting position-takings to which it is objectively related and which determine it by delimiting it" (Bourdieu 1983, p. 313), or "the emergence of a group capable of 'making an epoch' of imposing a new, advanced position is accompanied by the displacement of the structure of temporally hierarchized positions opposed within a field; each of them moves a step down the temporal hierarchy which is at the same time a social hierarchy" (p. 340). My own argument is not concerned with systems of positions as such, although I recognize the usefulness of such analysis. I am more concerned with the structural features of national intellectual fields (e.g., cultural requirements, the role of various institutions in regulating the field, the structure of intellectual markets, etc.).

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to Derrida's work, see Jameson (1972); Culler (1975); Descombes (1980); Lentricchia (1980); Norris (1982); and Leitch (1983).

cultural requirements, and helped its institutionalization as important work. The diffusion of Derrida's work in France in the past 20 years was also aided by three of its characteristics: (1) it fitted in with the intellectual culture of specific fractions of the French upper-middle class; (2) its politics appealed to French intellectuals at the end of the 1960s; and (3) it appealed to the professional interests of philosophers by promoting a new image of their field during an institutional legitimacy crisis.

### Deconstruction

The starting point of Derrida's inquiry is the famous *Cours de linguistique générale* (Course in general linguistics [1915] 1972) of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), which is regarded as the seminal text of structuralism. De Saussure distinguishes the signifier (a sound or written sign) from the signified (a concept or idea) as the two primary constituents of language. He argues that the association between these two elements is arbitrary. Nothing justifies the association between the idea "pipe" and the written sign "p-i-p-e." Languages are understood as systems of signs formed by arbitrarily associated signifiers and signified. The meaning of each sign is relational, that is, defined only by its difference from other signs. For instance, the letter "a" is meaningful only in relation to b, c, . . . z. Languages are systems of relations in which each constituent has a meaning only in relation to other constituents. In his structural arguments, de Saussure contradicts the philological approach that dominated 19th-century linguistics and that centered on the historical evolution of language conceived as a human product. In contrast, de Saussure's structuralist approach emphasizes synchrony and syntax.

Derrida questions the Saussurian idea of *difference*, which assumes that *X* is clearly distinct from *Y*. He argues that pure difference does not exist: *X* contains *Y*, as it is partially defined by it. Signs both supplement and partially express one another. The relationship between elements, signs, or "traces" (written signs) is one of "*Différance*" (Derrida 1972, pp. 24–28).

The concept of "*différance*," created by Derrida, is central to his theoretical system. It means both to differ (being distinct, discernible) and to defer (being present while being omitted, the omission having a significance in what is present). Both meanings are subsumed in the French verb *différer*. Stated in Derrida's terms,

*Différance* is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is "present," appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what

is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or future considered as modified present. In order for it to be, an interval must separate it from what it is not, but the interval that constitutes it in the present must also, and by the same token, divide the present in itself, thus dividing, along with the present, everything that can be conceived on its basis, that is every being—in particular, for our metaphysical language, the substance or subject. [Derrida (1967) 1973, pp. 142–43]

Any element contains other elements. Therefore, the idea of an original, determining instance or presence is logically impossible. The world is made up of interreferring elements, none of which has precedence. These propositions are the starting point for a full-fledged attack on the whole philosophical tradition that, Derrida argues, rests on dichotomous categories such as being/nothingness, truth/error, and nature/culture. Derrida characterizes the Occidental intellectual tradition as a search for a transcendental being that serves as the origin or guarantor of meaning. Following Nietzsche, he argues that the philosophical enterprise is logocentric in its attempt to ground the meaning relations constitutive of the world in an instance that itself lies outside all relationality.

De Saussure's work is centered on the analysis of spoken language, as he assumes that speech more fully reveals meaning than does the written sign. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida denies the existence of essential meanings and proposes an approach to the study of written signs that exposes the multiplicity of possible interpretations. He promotes deconstruction as a method for decodifying the various and often contradictory meanings of a text. Much like Barthes, Derrida shows that there is no vantage point external to the discourse from which it is possible to identify a transcendental meaning. In line with this approach, books themselves are considered collections of signs, as are the names of the authors. Texts are abstracted from the presumed intentions of the authors and from their literary and social contexts. The traditional separation between literature and criticism becomes meaningless, as any reading is a re-creation of a text, a never-ending process of interpretation (Derrida [1967] 1976, p. 226).

The goal of deconstruction is to uncover the implicit hierarchies contained in any text by which an order is imposed on reality and by which a subtle repression is exercised, as these hierarchies exclude, subordinate, and hide the various potential meanings. "To 'deconstruct' philosophy, thus, would be to think—in the most faithful, interior way—the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time, to determine—from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnameable by philosophy—what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repres-

sion" (Derrida [1972] 1981*a*, p. 6). Deconstruction is thus conceived as a metascience surpassing the metaphysics of logocentric systems: "It inscribes and delimits science; . . . it marks and at the same time loosens the limits which close classical scientificity" (Derrida 1981*a*, p. 36).

Understanding the nexus of the theory itself and its intellectual environment is crucial here. Many elements of the style and content of Derrida's work contribute to its legitimation and merit consideration: (1) Derrida's writing and argumentation styles meet the cultural requirements of the French intellectual milieu; (2) the originality of Derrida's work, its explicit association with philosophical classics, and its contribution to intellectual debates fulfill certain academic requirements; (3) the application of deconstruction to classics and its transcendence of the philosophical tradition give it prestige and contribute to the theory's potential for intellectual diffusion, as does the repetitive nature of the framework.

#### Academic and Cultural Requirements

Derrida describes his writing style in the following terms: "To be entangled in hundreds of pages of a writing simultaneously insistent and elliptical, imprinting as you saw, even its erasures, carrying off each concept to an interminable chain of differences, surrounding or confusing itself with so many precautions, references, notes, citations, collages, supplements—this 'meaning-to-say-nothing' is not, you will agree, the most assured of exercises" ([1972] 1981*b*, p. 14).

Some have described this style as a game, a "pleasure without responsibility," and others, as a deliberate attempt to confuse the reader, a "technique of trouble" (Watson 1978, p. 13). Derrida, like other French intellectuals, is renowned for writing in a sophisticated and somewhat obscure style (Lemert 1981, p. 10). Moreover, most contemporary French philosophers share Derrida's highly dialectical style of argument. Postwar French intellectuals were strongly influenced by Hegel and Marx, who shaped their basic cultural framework (Descombes 1980). To write and argue within the dialectical framework shared by intellectuals is to capitalize on the established thinking and reading habits of the French public and to increase, ipso facto, one's potential for diffusion (Bourdieu 1975, p. 110). In contrast, Jacques Bouveresse, one of the few French analytic philosophers, writes, in his "Why I Am So Very UnFrench": "I have been told that my own works were practically unreadable by the French philosophical public because they were concerned essentially with 'logic' (which meant in addition that they were not in any event worth reading, inasmuch as they contained nothing that was properly philosophical)" (1983, p. 10).

A sophisticated rhetoric seems to be a structural requirement for intellectual legitimation in the French philosophical community: rhetorical virtuosity contributes to the definition of status boundaries and maintenance of stratification among French philosophers. To participate in the field, one has to play the rhetorical game, and this environmental characteristic is present in Derrida's work.

A highly rhetorical writing style is shared or emulated by many less successful French philosophers and is therefore not a decisive or automatic criterion of intellectual legitimation. More important is the creation of a *theoretical trademark* framed within an established intellectual tradition (Bourdieu 1986, p. 159). Derrida has created a theoretical apparatus that is clearly distinct from other philosophical systems. Deconstruction presents a set of "non-concepts"—to use his term—such as trace, gramme, supplement, hymen, tympan, dissemination, and metaphor, that serve to designate the phenomena studied. Derrida's theoretical apparatus is so clearly packaged and labeled that it can readily circulate in the intellectual community. As Heirich (1976, p. 37) argues, packaging ideas as commodities improves their potential exposure and facilitates their penetration into various intellectual milieus. Sartre's "existentialism," Althusser's "epistemological break," Lefèbvre's "*quotidienneté*," Lacan's "unconscious text" and "mirror stage," Foucault's "archaeology," and Deleuze's "schizo-analysis" (Descombes 1980; Kurzweil 1980) may well have served as theoretical trademarks in the legitimation of their work.

Academic works need to be framed in relation to the major debates of a field and associated with the major authors in order to be legitimated (Adatto and Cole 1981; Bourdieu 1975). Deconstruction resembled other theoretical systems enough to fit and be incorporated into the Parisian intellectual milieu of the 1960s, that is, to be judged sufficiently significant and relevant by the philosophical audience to be included in the system of diffusion. Derrida's references to the transcendence of philosophical discourse and the end of philosophy were central themes of texts widely read in the 1960s (Althusser's *For Marx* and Marx and Engels's *German Ideology* [Ferry and Renaut 1985]). Also central were references to the Saussurian questions and to the multiplicity of meaning and intertextuality, themes that are basic to semiology. He presented his theoretical innovations as a continuation of the writings of Husserl, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, and in opposition to Hegel. Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger's critique of the logocentrism of the philosophical tradition, and Nietzsche's critique of humanism are explicitly presented as the theoretical antecedents of deconstruction. Derrida's conception of interpretation as a free play of the mind is also borrowed directly from Nietzsche. Derrida defines himself in opposition to Hegel and criticizes the Hegelian

ideas of totality and contradiction as the epitomes of the ideas of unity and presence (Derrida 1981*a*, pp. 40–41).

Finally, like Barthes, Foucault, and Lacan, Derrida builds on the established culture of the left-oriented European intellectual public when he focuses on the relationship between power, on the one hand, and culture, knowledge, and rationality, on the other. The Frankfurt school, the Birmingham school, and Italian Marxism all make this issue a central one. This question has historically been important in socialist thought, as seen in the roles of the party and of intellectuals.

### Prestige and Diffusion

The legitimation of Derrida's work is facilitated by the philosophical tradition in which he situates it: deconstruction gains prestige from its affiliation with Heidegger, Husserl, and Nietzsche, its transcendence of the philosophical tradition, and its application to classics (Boltanski 1975). Also, the ambiguity of this framework and its adaptability to any text favor its reproduction. By enhancing the diffusibility of Derrida's work, these features contribute to its legitimation. It is therefore useful to consider the effect of these features in greater detail at this point in my discussion.

Heidegger, Husserl, Nietzsche, and Hegel are among the most prestigious philosophers in what is seen in France as perhaps the most prestigious philosophical tradition—German philosophy (Wahl 1962; Descombes 1980). By carrying on a dialogue with these classics, Derrida acquires some of their prestige and positions himself in a theoretical tradition defined as important. Had he worked on Hume, Locke, or Mill, the story would have been rather different and for reasons relatively unconnected with the actual substance of his analyses.

Derrida attacks what has been defined as one of the central problems of philosophy, which is, as he puts it more precisely, the problem of the fate of philosophy itself; he questions its groundings and tries to overcome its insufficiencies. As a metascience, deconstruction seeks both to contain and transcend philosophy. This subsuming feature has helped to define his work as important (Boltanski 1975). Further, deconstruction gives its audience the means to interpret the whole philosophical tradition and to overcome it by becoming acquainted with a single system. As such, it offers important payoffs to those unfamiliar with the classics; for example, one of my informants has observed that, on the basis of Derrida's work, American undergraduate students in literary criticism currently discuss the logocentrism of the philosophical tradition without having read a single classic of philosophy.

Derrida's theoretical strategy consists in pointing to implicit meanings

by shifting the focus of interpretation and placing himself above the texts themselves. He applies this strategy to various authors important in the Western tradition (Rousseau, Mallarmé, Freud, Valéry, Artaud). The institutionalized prestige of these classics trickles down to his interpretation. Also, by deconstructing their work, Derrida can carry on a dialogue with specialists in these classics (e.g., Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, Michel Foucault, Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Ricoeur), whose stature will contribute to and complement the process of institutionalizing Derrida's work as important.

Derrida's focus on implicit meaning and his dialectical arguments create much ambiguity in his writing and generate endless debates on his work. What Searle has called the "heads I win, tails you lose" Derridian argument maintains the reproduction of deconstruction because of the absence of nonrelativist criteria to evaluate the theory. Also, its reproduction is favored by the fact that the same deconstructive operations can be applied to any text. This is an advantage for those who use his technique, in terms both of the accessibility of working material and of the ability to transfer their expertise to new texts or fields.

Finally, Derrida provides his intellectual public with a charismatic image of the avant-garde intellectual. Because he conceives the reader as re-creating the text, he represents his work as a creative enterprise similar to that of an artist or writer (see, e.g., *Positions* [1981a]). Like Barthes and Lévi-Strauss before him, Derrida, through his work, presents intellectual life as the adventure of a modern Prometheus whose rationality challenges power. Along with other charismatic intellectuals, Derrida provides a role model for young French intellectuals and has increased the appeal of the humanities.

### Social, Political, and Institutional Contexts

We have seen that Derrida meets a number of the cultural and academic requirements of the French intellectual scene, such as having a sophisticated writing style, a distinctive theoretical framework, and a focus on questions defined as both important and concerned with an important philosophical tradition. These requirements are a part of the environment in which Derrida has had to define his work, and his fulfilling these requirements is a sine qua non for the legitimation of his work, quite independent of its content. This work, I suggest, also fits the larger French intellectual, political, and professional contexts that facilitated Derrida's diffusion. By contexts, I refer to (1) the intellectual references of French upper-middle-class culture, (2) the political context of the late 1960s, and (3) the institutional changes in philosophy.



1. The consumption habits of segments of the upper-middle class (professionals in the cultural sectors and human services, teachers, civil servants) and their patterns of participation in the intellectual culture facilitated the diffusion of Derrida's work. The very limited possibilities for upward economic mobility between and within social classes characteristic of postwar France were compensated for by investments in educational and cultural mobility, especially by the upper-middle class (Marceau 1977). During this period, members of the cultural segments invested greatly in the consumption of sophisticated cultural goods (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1987) as a means of maintaining and improving their status. By consuming a cultural *produit de luxe*, one becomes an initiated member of a status group. Among those "products" are sophisticated intellectual goods, including deconstruction itself, which is barely accessible even to the highly educated; it requires considerable investment to be understood and is targeted at an intellectual elite. Along these lines, Lucette Finas, a Parisian proponent of Derrida, notes: "To open to a larger public a work as important and difficult as Derrida's would necessarily create deformities, approximations and impoverishment. The difficulty of the text is not an accident. It is linked to the way knowledge may be transmitted through writing. Jacques Derrida is a writer, and no systematic or didactic presentation of what is called his ideas can reproduce the proliferating complexity of the text" (Finas 1973, p. 13). Packaging deconstruction as a sophisticated cultural good increases its potential for diffusion, given the importance of symbolic status boundaries for the target public. Moreover, it improves the fit between Derrida's work and a large extant market.

2. The diffusion of Derrida's work peaked at the beginning of the 1970s, a few years after the French political climax of May 1968. After the student insurrection, intellectuals had grown weary of traditional Marxist rhetoric (Judt 1986; Wuthnow et al. 1984, p. 135). The post-1968 years were a period of stagnation for the Left, and leftist analyses were in need of rejuvenation. Derrida provided just the theoretical position that met and matched the political climate. Like other structuralist and post-structuralist intellectuals (Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault), indeed like Sartre before them, Derrida looked at more subtle forms of manifestations of power that had been ignored by classical Marxism. Similar to Marx's theory of ideology, Derrida's work postulated that power and hierarchies are hidden behind the apparent meanings of texts. Deconstructing meant identifying those hierarchies of meaning. The theoretical goal became a "Nietzschean affirmation, the joyous affirmation of the free-play of the word without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation" (1981a, p. 43). As Jay (1984, p. 516)

and Ryan (1982, p. 213) point out, this framework sustained a form of theoretical anarchism. It fitted the climate of the French cultural market in the late 1960s.

3. The diffusion of Derrida's work was favored by its connection with the professional interests of philosophers. French philosophy went through a legitimacy crisis in the 1960s and 1970s. The government attempted to reduce the philosophy requirements in lycées, and the social sciences launched strong critiques against the philosophical enterprise. Derrida defended philosophy by attacking the logocentrism of these criticisms and by reformulating the philosophical project as the intellectual enterprise that takes the most far-reaching and critical analytical perspective (G.R.E.P.H. 1977). By doing so, he promoted a positive image of philosophy—criticizing, following Barthes, “old academism” and countering simultaneously the decline of the field. He attempted to delegitimize science as a logocentric discourse. His epistemological answer to the crisis spawned a large following in certain circles. The fit between Derrida's conception of philosophy and the disciplinary crisis again favored the diffusion of his work.

In this section I have been concerned with the effect of a producer's work on the institutionalization of his theory. I have also been interested in delineating the link between Derrida's work and the cultural and institutional environment that it exists in. I will now be concerned with uncovering a second layer of intellectual legitimation, namely, the process through which peers and the intellectual public came to define a theory and its producer as “important.”

#### DERRIDA'S INTELLECTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL TRAJECTORY

The legitimation of cultural products is highly dependent on intellectual collaboration and institutional settings. I argue that (1) institutional settings (schools, journals, professional associations) and Derrida's participation in the structuralist debate contribute to the definition of his work as important; (2) Derrida's professional trajectory meets the institutional requirements defined by the trajectory of other intellectuals; (3) his access to these settings is conditioned by his display of specific forms of cultural capital; (4) Derrida's intellectual collaborators have provided him with the institutional supports essential to the intellectual legitimation of his work; (5) intellectual collaboration and institutional support are highly interrelated; and (6) deconstruction is not disseminated in a unified market but rather among actors whose definition of good work segments cultural markets.

## Institutional Supports for Intellectual Legitimation

Derrida participated in institutions that contributed to disseminating his work and defining it as important. Because many French intellectuals have access to the same prestigious institutions, Derrida's participation in those institutions—journals, schools, cultural media, professional associations—can be considered as meeting structural requirements for intellectual legitimation in France.

The schools where Derrida received his philosophical education gave him legitimate cultural codes. He studied philosophy at the *Ecole normale supérieure* (rue d'Ulm), which is the most prestigious French institution for the study of philosophy and one of the centers of philosophy in France (Clark and Clark 1982). He also studied at the Sorbonne with Hippolyte and Gandillac. The support of these influential professors gave Derrida his first opportunities to publish and helped mark him as a promising beginner. "Ulm" and the Sorbonne provided Derrida with an institutional context for peer assessment of his aspirations and capabilities. Most members of the Parisian intellectual elite attended Ulm and formed circles in this school that played an important role in their careers. Students shared the same intellectual world; therefore, they tended to define the same questions as important (Bourdieu 1969, p. 113).

Two journals were especially influential in the diffusion of Derrida's work and its institutionalization as a significant contribution: *Tel Quel* and *Critique*. Similar to Sartre's *Les Temps modernes*, these journals published essays in literary criticism and philosophy directed toward the Parisian academic public. *Critique*, edited by Jean Piel, presented the work of various renowned philosophers, including Gilles Deleuze, Emmanuel Lévinas, Michel Foucault, and Paul Ricoeur. While *Critique* was more eclectic, *Tel Quel* was at the center of the *Nouvelle Critique*, an intellectual movement that involved important intellectuals such as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Phillippe Sollers. This journal embodied the shared views of its collaborators and institutionalized their intellectual circle. Derrida's collaboration with this journal was based on cultural affinities, which illustrates that intellectual collaboration results in institutional support. *Tel Quel's* intellectual project has been to deconstruct hierarchies based on a transcendental signified (Caws 1973; Jameson 1980, p. 732). During the 1960s, this journal exercised notable influence on leftist intellectuals. Its critique of traditional academism symbolized for some the intellectual avant-garde beliefs of May 1968. The influence of *Tel Quel* shifted the focus of attention to its contributors.

The diffusion of Derrida's work to the general intellectual public was the result of its coverage by the main cultural media. Cultural magazines

and newspapers have become central to Parisian intellectual life as they define what one has to read in order to be considered “literate” (Debray 1979; Hamon and Rotman 1981). They cater to the intellectual culture of the upper-middle class, and their control over access to that market is a structural feature of the French intellectual scene. It is therefore essential for intellectual producers to fit into the circles of these cultural publications (Pinto 1981). They gave increasing prominence to Derrida’s work following an interesting double tour de force: in 1967, Derrida published three major books—*Of Grammatology* (1976), *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), and *Writing and Difference* ([1967] 1980). In 1972, he again published simultaneously *Dissémination* (1981*b*), *Positions* (1981*a*), and *Marges de la philosophie*. In 1967–68, his work was reviewed by *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, and *Le Monde*. In 1972, *Les Lettres françaises* published a special issue on his work, as did *Arc* in 1973. An article published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1975 placed Derrida among the four “high priests” of the French university, along with Barthes, Foucault, and Lacan. During this period, Derrida was strongly supported at *Le Monde* by a former student, Christian de la Campagne, and at *Le Nouvel Observateur*.<sup>7</sup>

Derrida joined the full-time faculty of the Ecole normale supérieure in 1967 and started teaching at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales around 1984. Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, to name only a few, have also taught at the Ecole normale supérieure, and a large number of important specialists in the *sciences de l’homme* teach at the Ecole des hautes études. Derrida’s presence in these prestigious schools further institutionalized his vision of the world and also himself as an important philosopher. It also allowed him to develop a circle of Ulm students who created a journal—*Digraphe*—publishing articles inspired by his work. They edited books and interviews on and with Derrida such as *Ecartés* (Finas et al. 1973), *Mimésis des articulations* (Agacinski et al. 1975), and *Le Déclin de l’écriture* (Laruelle et al. 1977) and organized important conferences around Derrida’s work in 1976 and 1980. Lucette Finas, Sarah Kofman, Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Michel Rey, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others used the Derridian problematic as their trademark and created their own theoretical and institutional niches with deconstruction. Simultaneously, these disciples participated in the institutionalization of the Derridian problematic in the Parisian intellectual field.

Two organizations associated with the defense and promotion of

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that, relative to other French intellectuals, Derrida has not sought wide media coverage.

French philosophy also enhanced Derrida's visibility and intellectual legitimacy. In 1974, Derrida and his students created the Groupe de recherche sur l'enseignement de la philosophie (G.R.E.P.H.) in order to resist a governmental reform threatening jobs in philosophy. Derrida's political declaration concerning the "Réforme Giscard-Haby" steered the media's attention to him as a representative of the profession. Around 1981, the Socialist government appointed him as one of the directors of the Collège international de philosophie, whose publicly acknowledged mission is, among other things, to reaffirm the presence of French philosophy internationally (Collège 1982). This appointment reinforced his position in the French intellectual field and legitimized his presence in the United States.

Finally, Derrida's access to institutions was greatly facilitated by his cultural capital.<sup>8</sup> Several features of Derrida's work defined it as a high-status cultural good, particularly its references to a prestigious intellectual tradition and its display of erudition. References to high-status cultural works seem to have great influence on the legitimation of interpretive theories. Also, access to prestigious institutions is facilitated by cultural capital, that is, by cues indicating the sharing of a common high-status cultural background, whether it is the culture of the Ecole normale supérieure, the sharing of a common definition of important questions, or experiencing situations similarly (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985).

### The Structuralist Debate

Derrida defined himself as a poststructuralist by criticizing the structuralist enterprise for being logocentric in its search for structural explanatory principles and for giving priority to language. In "Force et dissémination" (1963), he had attacked Foucault and Lévi-Strauss, the founding father, through de Saussure. Foucault replied to Derrida in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* and in the second edition of *Madness and Civilization*, criticizing his interpretation of the Cartesian *cogito* (Giovannageli 1979, pp. 161–71). This debate gave Derrida the opportunity to display his distinctive theoretical trademark publicly and to be identified as a major actor in the structuralist controversy and as one of the main critics of structuralism.

A central theme for structuralists is their ongoing attack on the Western emphasis on humanism. They also look for hidden structures of

<sup>8</sup> Cultural capital is defined here as high-status cultural goods and practices that are used as bases of social selection (see Bourdieu 1981; for discussion, see also Lamont and Lareau 1987).

meaning and the organizational principles of systems (Kurzweil 1980). Derrida recognized the importance of these issues through his work on implicit meaning and his critique of the humanist tradition. His critiques helped to legitimate structuralism and institutionalize it as a school of thought. Concurrently, by responding to Derrida's objections, structuralists recognized and affirmed him as a significant critic, thus contributing to his intellectual legitimation (Bourdieu 1983, p. 323). Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault had well-established reputations in the mid-1960s, and their prestige trickled down to Derrida. As with other participants in this debate, Derrida's personal legitimacy grew through this association, and his legitimacy became linked to the legitimacy of the structuralist circle itself. Participation in a major public debate is characteristic of several other important French philosophers. These debates, such as between Barthes and Picard (1966), Foucault and Sartre (1966), Lévi-Strauss and Revel (1957), and Lévi-Strauss and Sartre (1962) were extensively covered by the media and provided unparalleled visibility.

The philosophical generation that dominated the French intellectual scene until the 1980s was being constituted at the end of the 1960s. In the space of a few years, a number of important books were published: Althusser's *For Marx* ([1965] 1969) and *Reading Capital* ([1965] 1977), Foucault's *The Order of Things* ([1966] 1971) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 1972), Lacan's *Ecrits* ([1966] 1977), Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) and *Writing and Difference* (1980), and Deleuze's *Différence et répétition* (1968). This philosophical generation produced a distinctive type of intellectual product that was not targeted at a specialized academic public of philosophers or historians but that was diffused largely by cultural media such as *Le Nouvel Observateur*. These intellectuals engaged (and partly generated) a wide intellectual public made up from a growing student body in the humanities and the social sciences (Bourdieu, Boltanski, and Maldidier 1971). Derrida benefited from his association with this intellectual generation both through its access to the cultural media and the general growth of the intellectual public.

Figure 1 describes the intellectual and institutional positioning of Derrida in France and the United States. It identifies Derrida's predecessors, supporters, opponents, diffusers, and disciples. It also presents the specialized journals, mass media, teaching institutions, and professional organizations that were institutional supports for his work. This figure links the intellectual and institutional supports described herein. (Derrida's positioning in the United States will be explained in the next section.) It points out ties among theoretical positions, intellectual collaboration, and access to institutions and shows that intellectual collaboration provides the means of diffusion.

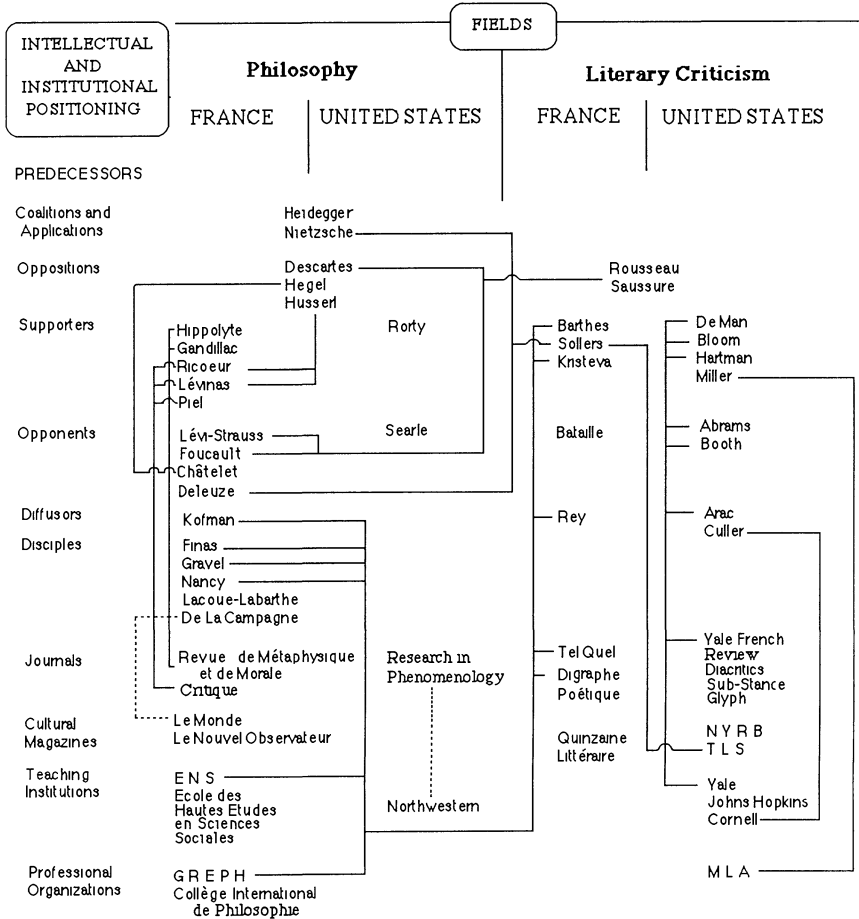


FIG. 1.—Intellectual and institutional positioning of Jacques Derrida in philosophy and literary criticism (France and the United States). This figure does not include all the actors and institutions with which Derrida has been involved but only those whose roles are described herein. A number of actors could have been included, both in philosophy and literary criticism and in more than one category or position. For instance, most diffusers are also supporters, and many French philosophers are simultaneously in philosophy and literary criticism.

The Diffusion of Derrida's Work

The diffusion of Derrida's work is characterized by three trends: (1) Although his work was first targeted to a specialized audience of phenomenologists, it became of interest to several diverse publics in the mid-1960s; (2) concurrently, phenomenologists lost interest in Derrida's work; and (3) the diffusion of deconstruction theory decreased significantly in France after a 1972–73 boom, while it increased consistently in the United States, attracting mostly literary critics.

Table 1 shows the publication history of Derrida's work in France, the United States, and other countries. Within each country, publications are broken down into philosophy and literary criticism journals and books. Derrida's first publications were in French philosophical journals. At the beginning of his career, his intellectual path followed the typical academic model in philosophy, which consists in performing an exegesis of a classic. He first worked on Husserl and published in the specialized philosophy journals—the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, *Les Etudes philosophiques*, and *Cahiers pour l'analyse*—put out by the Ecole normale supérieure. His participation in *Critique* and *Tel Quel* marked a shift, as he widened his theoretical interests and began to address himself to a larger audience. His theoretical niche is at the juncture of philosophy and literary criticism, because literary critics are concerned with questions of interpretation and meaning. Deconstruction theory also interested social scientists, who were engaged in the structuralist debate. Psychoanalysts, feminists, and art historians also became interested in applying this interpretive technique to their domains. The potential for diffusion of Derrida's work, which was located at the juncture of several already constituted publics, increased significantly, as Derrida capitalized on characteristics of the cultural environment while fitting his work to the structure of the intellectual market.

Speaking simultaneously to several publics is typical of dominant French intellectuals. For instance, Foucault addresses himself to doctors, psychoanalysts, criminologists, social scientists, historians, and philosophers (Wuthnow et al. 1984, p. 134). Deleuze and Lyotard are of interest to Marxists, psychoanalysts, and philosophers, and Ricoeur addresses phenomenologists, psychoanalysts, and literary critics. They all enlarge their public by raising theoretical problems in more than one field (e.g., Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge codes in mental hospitals and prisons). Developing a larger audience and a broader legitimacy base is a successful and adaptive strategy when the specialized public of professional philosophers is shrinking.

Some of the changes in the public for Derrida's work are reflected in the types of journals he published in. Despite a notable increase in the num-



TABLE 1  
ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION OF DERRIDA'S PUBLICATIONS  
BY COUNTRIES AND TYPE OF JOURNAL

	FRANCE			UNITED STATES			OTHER COUNTRIES	
	Ph.	L.C.	Books	Ph.	L.C.	Books	Articles	Books
1959	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
1960	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
1961	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
1962	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	...
1963	3	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
1964	5	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
1965	4	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
1966	3	2	...	...	...	...	...	...
1967	5	1	3	...	...	...	...	...
1968	2	3	...	...	...	...	...	1
1969	...	1	...	1	...	...	...	1
1970	1	2	...	1	1	...	...	...
1971	...	4	1	...	...	...	...	3
1972	...	2	3	...	3	...	...	2
1973	3	2	...	...	2	1	1	...
1974	2	1	2	...	2	...	1	1
1975	2	3	2	1	2	...	1	2
1976	2	5	2	...	2	1	...	1
1977	4	2	...	3	2	1	...	...
1978	...	2	3	1	4	2	...	...
1979	...	...	...	...	3	...	...	...
1980	...	...	1	...	3	...	...	...
1981	...	3	...	1	1	1	...	...
1982	...	2	2	...	3	...	...	...
1983	...	1	1	...	1	1	...	...
1984	1	...	1	1	2	1	...	...

NOTE.—Ph.: philosophy; L.C.: literary criticism. Data for 1959–78 based on Miller (1981, pp. 130–66), supplemented by Leavey and Allison (1977). Data for 1979–84 are from the *International Bibliography of Books and Articles on Modern Languages and Literature*, 1979–85, including section 4 (general literature and related topics) and subsections on criticism and literary theory. The 1979–84 data are clearly not exhaustive but sufficient for purposes of the current analysis.

ber of Derrida's publications, the number of articles he published in philosophy journals has decreased since 1967, and several articles published in philosophy journals after 1974 pertain to Derrida's defense of the institutional position of the field (Miller 1981, pp. 130–66). In contrast, the number of articles in literary criticism journals increased after 1967 and has remained greater than the number of philosophy articles.

In table 2, publications *on* Derrida have been broken down by type of journal (philosophy or literature) and country (France or the United States). The declining diffusion of Derrida's work in French philosophy

TABLE 2

PUBLICATIONS ON DERRIDA'S WORK BY COUNTRY (FRANCE/UNITED STATES)  
AND BY TYPE OF JOURNAL (PHILOSOPHY/LITERARY CRITICISM), 1963-1984

	FRANCE		UNITED STATES	
	Philosophy	Literary Criticism	Philosophy	Literary Criticism
1963	2	...	...	...
1964	...	...	...	...
1965	...	...	...	...
1966	1	...	...	...
1967	5	2	1	...
1968	5	1	1	2
1969	6	2	1	1
1970	2	4	...	3
1971	1	4	2	1
1972	3	17	...	4
1973	16	13	2	8
1974	5	10	3	7
1975	1	4	1	12
1976	4	...	1	15
1977	2	...	10	10
1978	...	...	8	7
1979	...	...	3	6
1980	...	...	2	22
1981	2	...	...	27
1982	1	...	...	16
1983	1	1	2	26
1984	...	...	3	56

NOTE.—Articles published in specialized journals and literary magazines, reviews and review articles, as well as books. In the case of collected editions, each article is counted as a publication. When the classification of articles by type of journal was impossible, the publications were classified on the basis of (1) the topic of the article and (2) the field of the author, if available. The publications that did not fit in one of the categories were excluded from the sample ( $N = 51$ , including 27 publications published in other countries for the period 1963-78). Belgian publications are included in the French sample, and Canadian publications in the American one. For the period 1963-78, the sample includes all the numbered items of Miller's (1981, pp. 130-66) bibliography, which has been supplemented by Leavey and Allison's (1977) bibliography. For the period 1979-84, data are from the *International Bibliography of Books and Articles on Modern Languages and Literature*, vols. 1, 2, and 4, subsections on deconstructionist literary theory, deconstructionist criticism, poststructuralism, "Derrida" (in categories "subject" and "Literature—20th Century"). The 1979-84 data are clearly not exhaustive but sufficient for purposes of the current analysis.

journals is shown in the decrease of articles on his work published in French journals after 1974. The decline of his popularity among philosophers can be related to Derrida's refusal to respect academic professional norms by choosing not to write a dissertation until 1980. Others, like Althusser and Foucault, had also decided not to pursue their *doctorat d'état*. One of my informants, who also made this choice, observed that this refusal expressed an important feature of the French intellectual

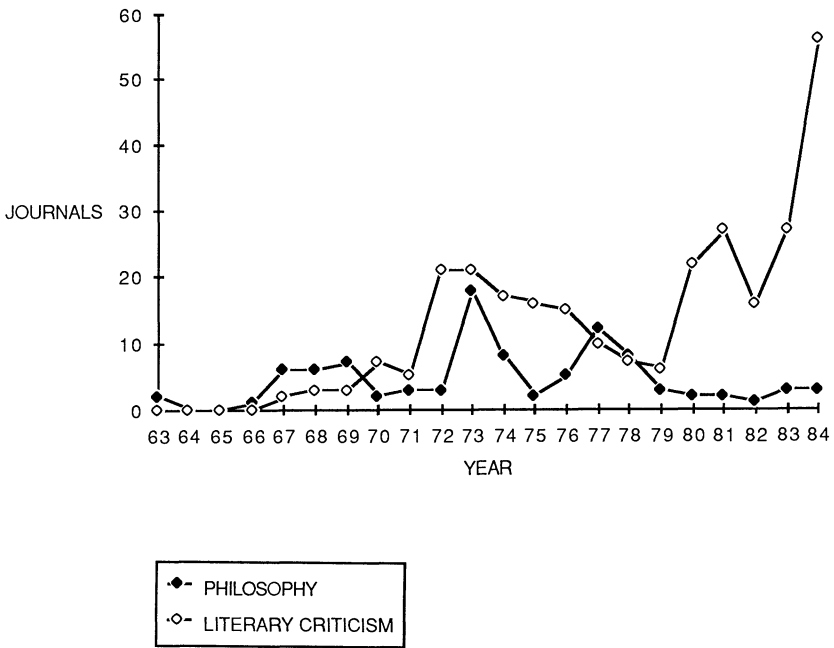


FIG. 2.—Publications on Derrida’s work by type of journal (philosophy/literary criticism) for France and the United States, 1963–84.

ethos: the power of the Cartesian *cogito* is proved by one’s ability to win the game without playing by the rules.

As shown in figure 2, publications in specialized philosophy journals on Derrida’s work started in 1963 and remained greater than publications in literary criticism journals until 1968. After a 1973 boom, the number of articles was quite irregular in philosophy journals. In contrast, publications in literary journals became important in 1970. A 1972–73 boom was followed by a progressive decline. However, on the average, literary criticism articles clearly outnumber philosophical articles after 1972. This figure illustrates that, over time, literary critics constituted a growing part of Derrida’s public, while the proportion of philosophers decreased. In the next section, I will argue that Derrida’s penetration of the American intellectual market was conditioned by a shift in public.

Figure 3 shows a time lag between French and American publications, which corresponds to the timing of the diffusion of Derrida’s work in both countries. The French 1972–73 boom—associated with Derrida’s simultaneous publication of three books and coverage of them by the mass media—was followed by a sharp decline in publications. In the United States, articles on deconstruction increased in number in 1973, after the

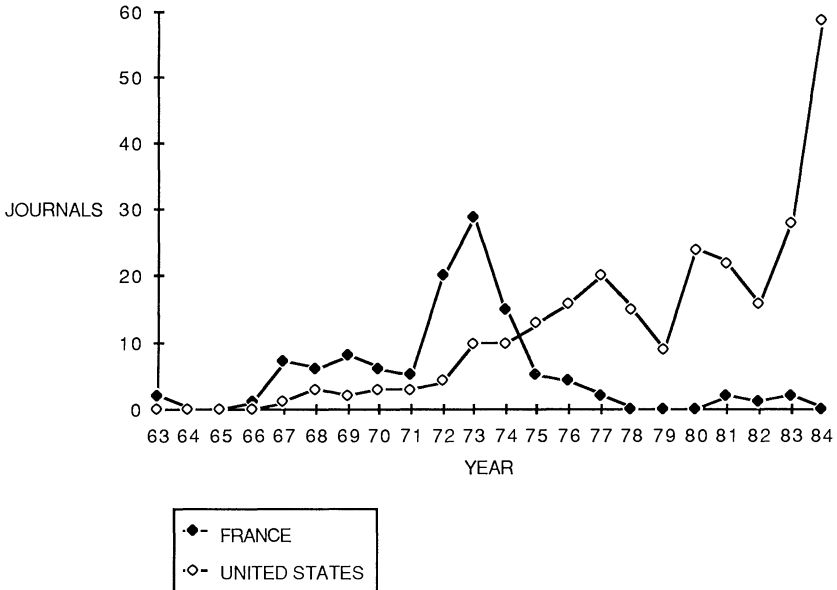


FIG. 3.—Publications on Derrida's work by country (France/United States) for philosophy and literary criticism journals, 1963–84.

publication of *Speech and Phenomena* in English. These also increased significantly in 1977, after the translation of *Of Grammatology* and the active promotion of deconstruction by a group of critics at Yale.

The diffusion of Derrida's work is relatively weak in countries other than the United States and France. For instance, between 1981 and 1984, the *International Bibliography of Books and Articles on Modern Languages and Literature* lists only 14 British entries referring to deconstruction in contrast to 103 American entries.<sup>9</sup> Following Miller (1981), only 11 British articles and books published between 1962 and 1978 concerned Derrida's work, in contrast to 87 for Barthes and 52 for Foucault.<sup>10</sup> During this period, 31 articles and books published in countries other than France, the United States, and the United Kingdom concerned

<sup>9</sup> This includes entries for books and articles listed in the following categories: deconstructionist criticism, deconstructive literary theory, and poststructuralist literary theory. In this last category, only the titles mentioning "deconstruction" or "Derrida" are counted. Canadian and American publications are counted together, as are publications from Belgium and France.

<sup>10</sup> Despite the absence of Barthes in my original sample of philosophers (Barthes's being more a literary critic than a philosopher), I am comparing the diffusion of Derrida's work with that of his and Foucault's work because comparable data on these three intellectuals are available in Miller (1981).

Derrida's work in contrast to 58 for Barthes and 98 for Foucault. The nihilism implicit in Derrida's work might partly explain this difference, as Derrida's diffusion is especially weak in countries where there is a strong leftist tradition among intellectuals. Foucault is relatively strong in such countries, with 32 Italian references and 35 Spanish and Latin American references for the 1962–78 period in contrast to 10 and eight, respectively, for Derrida.

In 1981, *Live*, a major French cultural magazine, asked 600 French intellectuals to identify the three most influential living French intellectuals. Academics, teachers, writers, artists, editors, politicians, and journalists were asked to answer the question. On the list of 36 intellectuals selected, Foucault came in third after Claude Lévi-Strauss and Raymond Aron. Among the philosophers, Bernard Henri-Lévy, a *nouveau philosophe*, was ninth, René Girard, fourteenth, Michel Serre, twentieth, Phillippe Sollers, twenty-fourth, and Louis Althusser, twenty-sixth. Derrida's name was absent. These results corroborate the sharp post-1973 drop in the diffusion of French articles on Derrida's work shown in figure 3. This decline can be partly explained by Derrida's distance from the political scene. Unlike Foucault, Derrida did not become involved in the political events that mobilized the French intelligentsia after 1975 (e.g., the Polish resistance and the gay and antinuclear movements). Foucault actively supported these movements, which gave him an impressive presence in the cultural magazines, especially in *Le Nouvel Observateur*.<sup>11</sup>

Several features of diffusion of Derrida's work support the hypothesis that (1) the legitimation of theories depends on a fit between his work and a structured cultural environment and (2) that these cultural markets are not unified markets, but rather they are segmented by definitions of good work. For example, the diffusion of this work was limited in several countries with a strong leftist intelligentsia. In France, the legitimation of Derrida's work was facilitated because, as noted earlier, rather than addressing this work to a shrinking philosophy public, Derrida spoke to several already constituted publics, capitalizing on the structure of the Parisian intellectual market.

In his transition from a limited to a larger public, Derrida adapted his work, which became increasingly unfit for the academic philosophy audience. His writings did not follow the traditional norms of the discipline: "The directions I had taken, the nature and diversity of the corpora, the

<sup>11</sup> The cultural media, i.e., the newspapers and magazines that provide a relatively large amount of cultural information, published 95 articles on Foucault or his work between 1966 and 1978, with 34 for Derrida and 61 for Barthes. They include *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Le Monde* (including "Hebdo" and *Le Monde des livres*), *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, *L'Express*, *Figaro littéraire*. Data are from Miller (1981).

labyrinthian geography of the itineraries drawing me on toward relatively unacademic areas, all of this persuaded me that . . . it was, in truth, no longer possible . . . to make what I was writing conform . . .” (Derrida 1983, p. 42). His style, his unconventional approach, his rejection of the logocentric tradition, and his popular support may also have contributed to the sharp decline of the diffusion of his work in French philosophy journals. The characteristics of the intellectual market (e.g., the growth and decline of disciplines, the presence of a large intellectual public) are environmental features that shape the potential diffusion and legitimation of works.

In this section, I have focused on the institutionalization of Derrida’s work by the public and his peers. I have contended that the legitimation of cultural products is dependent on institutional supports and that access to these supports is dependent on cultural collaboration—the structured cultural and institutional systems being highly interrelated (fig. 1). Sharing a common definition of good work is essential not only for the integration of a theory into a cultural milieu but also for its actual diffusion. To understand this legitimation process, it is necessary to identify channels of diffusion; cultural products are not diffused in unified markets but rather among actors whose definition of good work segments cultural markets. This hypothesis, which will be sustained by findings presented in the next section, has also been suggested by sociologists of science (Whitley 1984; Isambert 1985) and seems to be important for understanding the legitimation of both empirical and nonempirical theories.

#### THE AMERICAN CONNECTION

The legitimation of Derrida’s work in America results from mechanisms similar to those active in its legitimation in France, that is, (1) the definition of this work as important by Derrida, his peers, and the public, and (2) a fit between Derrida’s work and the American intellectual and institutional environment (i.e., its adaptation to already existing intellectual agendas and its diffusion by prestigious universities and journals). I contend that the second factor is the key to its diffusion among highly differentiated publics in France and the United States. I first describe the conditions under which structuralism was legitimated in the United States, given the fact that structuralism prepared the ground for deconstruction and that several factors that influenced the diffusion of structuralism also influenced the diffusion of deconstruction. Second, I describe the conditions of the legitimation of deconstruction in American literary criticism. Third, I contend that the diffusion of deconstruction was limited in American philosophy by preexisting intellectual norms. Finally, I argue that the diffusion of structuralism was linked to struc-

tural trends in American literary criticism, such as the concurrent importation of the work of several other French intellectuals, a disciplinary crisis, and the hegemony of theorists in the discipline.

### Structuralism in America

The legitimation of Derrida's work was related to the cultural context that predated its importation and that contained conditions favoring its diffusion. New Criticism was among the most influential theories in the field of American literary criticism from the 1940s to the end of the 1950s. In 1957, Northrop Frye published his *Anatomy of Criticism*, launching a powerful attack against the textual emphasis of this approach. In conjunction with other critiques published previously (see Sutton 1963, pp. 219–67), Frye's critique precipitated a deep crisis in American literary criticism. The extant paradigm was rejected, and new paradigms gained consensus and filled the void. French structuralism was successfully introduced, partly as a response to the vacuum created by the end of New Criticism; it indirectly prepared the ground for the arrival of deconstruction.

An international conference on structuralism was organized at Johns Hopkins in 1966 under the title "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" (Macksey and Donato 1970). Many French intellectuals associated with structuralism were invited: Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Serge Doubrovsky, Lucien Goldmann, Jacques Lacan, and Tzvetan Todorov were all present. This was the first large-scale introduction of structuralism to America, and it was followed by the publication of a special issue of *Yale French Studies* in 1966 on structuralism. However, structuralists did not gain a substantial American following until the beginning of the 1970s, when several books were published introducing structuralism to the American public (e.g., Jameson's *Prison-House of Language*, Boon's *From Symbolism to Structuralism*, and Scholes's *Structuralism in Literature*) (Ruegg 1979). Several further factors favored the diffusion of structuralism in the United States. A limited number that also contributed to the diffusion of deconstruction can be pointed to here: First, comparative literature departments did not have a long intellectual tradition and were in search of a paradigm. French specialists have long enjoyed a high status in comparative literature, which facilitated the spread of their influence. Second, structuralism "epitomized dangerously seductive qualities of style; as intellectual fashion goes, it was flashy, different, ingenious, and slightly exotic" (Ruegg 1979, p. 189). These qualities offered hope of rejuvenation for the traditionally austere and meticulous American literary criticism. Third, some American scholars saw the chance to build their own institutional and intellectual positions

by promoting the importation of structuralism, and they organized an impressive number of colloquia. Structuralism was a way for a growing new generation to construct and secure a niche in opposition to older scholars by introducing new theoretical standards. Fourth, like New Criticism itself, structuralism was a *theoretical* approach, and, as such, it could be applied to many kinds of literary products. It constituted a potentially powerful basis of intellectual influence extending across literature departments and bridging the gap between specialists in different periods and national literatures.

### The Diffusion of Deconstruction

Derrida arrived on the American scene in the same period as structuralism. At the Johns Hopkins conference, he presented a vitriolic critique of Lévi-Strauss. The prestige of French literary criticism and of structuralism in particular trickled down to deconstruction, which soon became "*le hip du hip*" as it superseded the trendiest of new theories.

A complex interaction of factors facilitated the diffusion of Derrida's work in the United States, several of which were associated with the possibility of integrating it into already existing intellectual agendas and of disseminating it through prestigious institutions. This diffusion was greatly aided by the presence of the "American Connection" in private elite universities that had been centers of American literary criticism, particularly Yale, Cornell, and Johns Hopkins. Furthermore, the diffusion of Derrida's work from prestigious to less prominent departments (e.g., UC-Irvine, UCLA, SUNY-Binghamton [Arac, Godzich, and Martin 1983, p. xiii]) enhanced its potential for legitimacy on the periphery. This factor is important given the size and the decentralization of the American academic structure.

The process of diffusion was also aided by several journals that published work on deconstruction regularly: *Diacritics*, *Sub-Stance*, *Glyph*, and the *Georgia Review*. These journals, which played for deconstruction a role similar to that played by the *Kenyon Review* and the *Sewanee Review* for New Criticism, helped in creating an audience for Derrida and in institutionalizing deconstruction as a legitimate theory, as did a number of books and articles treating deconstruction in relation to Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and so forth.<sup>12</sup> J. Hillis Miller, a Derridian scholar, was elected president of the Modern Language Association in 1986 (Campbell 1986). The recognition of modern French literary criticism by this conservative professional association contributed greatly to

<sup>12</sup> In Miller (1981), I have identified 12 articles published between 1968 and 1972 linking Derrida to Dante, Pirandello, Russell, Wittgenstein, etc.



the legitimation of Derrida's work. It also aided in diffusing it in various language departments (English, German, Italian, etc.) and provided deconstruction with a wider and growing audience.

The diffusion of Derrida's work in the United States required the interest of renowned scholars who could incorporate it into their own work, while presenting it to the American audience as something important and worth reading. Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller attended the Johns Hopkins conference and later became energetic proponents of Derrida's work, as did Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman. They all began to integrate deconstruction into their intellectual agenda and to translate Derrida's work in terms both accessible and attractive to the larger American audience. For instance, Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) associated Derrida's work with Chomsky's and argued that it transcended de Saussure's, Lévi-Strauss's, Barthes's, and so on. De Man assimilated some aspects of deconstruction to New Criticism (Gasché 1979), while others presented deconstruction as a technique of reading, building on New Criticism's technique of "close reading" (Atkins and Johnson 1985). As a sophisticated Parisian cultural good, Derrida's work could and did reinforce the disciplinary position of the Yale scholars, whose influence had traditionally depended partly on the display of high-status cultural references.

Each member of the Yale enclave already had a reputation by 1975, but they did not constitute a cohesive group. Derrida's theoretical contribution provided them with a shared interest and focus on which to base a solid alliance that would propel them to the summit of their discipline. They came to define themselves as a group as they published in collaboration (e.g., *Deconstruction and Criticism* [Bloom et al. 1979]) and, starting in 1976, debated criticism at conferences and professional meetings. They soon were labeled the "Yale Critics" or the "Yale School of Criticism" (Arac et al. 1983; Campbell 1986; Davis and Schleifer 1985) and gained considerable visibility in most language departments by the end of the seventies. In a small sample of manuscripts submitted to the *Publications of the Modern Language Association* in 1979, they were among the most-often cited authors, with, in decreasing order, 10 mentions for Derrida, seven for Barthes, six for J. Hillis Miller, five for Paul de Man, and four each for Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman (Conarroe 1980, p. 3). Also illustrative of Derrida's and the Yale Critics' influence is the fact that, during that period, their work became the center of major debates in the field. Lentricchia states the situation cogently: "Derrida and his followers have managed to create a genuine controversy by solidifying an opposition party whose various constituents, until now, never have had much use for one another. The traditional historicists, the Chicago neo-Aristotelians, the specialists in American literature, the Stanford moral-

ists, the myth critics of the Frye type, old-line Freudians, critics of consciousness . . . the budding structuralists and the grandchildren of the New Critics . . . all have found themselves united against a common enemy in a Traditionalism which, though imposed upon them by the Derridian polemic, has seemed to suit these strange bedfellows just fine” (Lentricchia 1980, p. 159).

This large opposition was related to Derrida’s attack on the basic tenets of the humanist tradition and interpretive activity. The very violence of these attacks contributed to the institutionalization of deconstruction; it indicated that Derrida had become a force to be contended with (Arac et al. 1983, p. xiii; Martin 1983).

The influence of the Yale Critics on the diffusion of deconstruction is extremely important. Derrida’s position in the United States is greatly dependent on this exceptionally strong and concentrated academic support in literature departments. No other French intellectual has as strong an academic base in the United States—for instance, on the average, between 1978 and 1984, 26 pieces related to Derrida’s work were published in literary journals per year in contrast to 14 for Foucault.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Derrida’s support outside literature departments is relatively weak. For instance, his American public is narrower than Foucault’s; between 1981 and 1984, on the average, Foucault had 280 citations a year in the *Social Science Citation Index* in contrast to 59 for Derrida, in part because of Foucault’s strong support from Marxists in various disciplines. Along with Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, and Barthes, Foucault is more strongly supported by cultural magazines such as *Commentary*, *New Republic*, the *New Yorker*, or the *New York Review of Books* than Derrida.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that the mechanisms through which Derrida penetrated the French and the American markets differ. In America, professional institutions such as prestigious departments, journals, and associations have been essential. In France, access to the large intellectual public through the cultural media was more important. This illustrates the difference in the structures of the two markets—the general intellectual

<sup>13</sup> Based on entries listed under “Derrida” and “Foucault” in the categories “subject” and “French literature—20th century” in the *International Bibliography of Books and Articles on Modern Languages and Literature*. The difference between Derrida’s and Foucault’s diffusion in literature journals is in reality much greater, as several categories that contain references to Derrida’s work are not included here, i.e., deconstructive approach, deconstructive criticism, and deconstructive theory.

<sup>14</sup> Between 1960 and 1979, Derrida was covered six times by British and American cultural media, in contrast to 43 times for Barthes and 44 for Foucault, in these American and British publications: the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* (and *Guardian Weekly*), *Newsweek*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Times* (Sunday), and the *Economist*. Data are from Miller (1981).

milieu having more influence on French than on American upper-middle-class culture through the cultural magazines that provide the French upper-middle class with intellectual culture as an important form of cultural capital. In contrast, in the United States, intellectual life is not as central to upper-middle-class culture. Thus, cultural capital seems to take expressive rather than cognitive forms and to be expressed through other forms of high culture and through behaviors such as conspicuous consumption, self-reliance, individualism, problem-solving activism, entrepreneurship, and leadership (see, e.g., the analyses of the American middle class by Bellah et al. [1985] and Varennes [1977]; see also Lamont and Lareau 1987). The success of Foucault with the American cultural magazines is somewhat exceptional and might suggest a change in the relationship between the culture of specific fractions of the American upper-middle class and the intellectual culture.

Derrida's work was largely ignored by American philosophers until the mid-1970s, except for some phenomenologists at Northwestern University for whom his writings offered a new and seductive way of formulating traditional hermeneutic questions. It was only later that it spread to the wider American philosophical public, via Derrida's debate with John Searle in the *New York Review of Books* (1983) and via Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). Its reception was necessarily limited because, in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, the philosophy of language occupies a central place, while phenomenology has been relatively marginal. Moreover, the emphasis that analytic philosophy puts on language is antagonistic to the primary assumption of deconstruction concerning logocentrism. The intellectual operations and style typical of deconstruction are in decided opposition to the ethos of analytic philosophy, which emphasizes precision, clarity of language, and detailed argumentation. The differences between analytic philosophy and deconstruction explain the lesser visibility of Derrida in both American and British philosophy, where its diffusion is also limited by the presence of a strong Marxist tradition. This further demonstrates that cultural environments define and delimit the value and, more important, the scholarly reception of a body of work.

The diffusion of Derrida's work in the United States was structured by features and trends in American literary criticism. First, as noted above, Derrida's work was imported concurrently with that of a number of other French scholars (e.g., Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Marguerite Duras, Michel Foucault, René Girard, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan) and profited from that association. French intellectuals were presented as a package (e.g., in Descombes's *Modern French Philosophy*, Dew's *French Philosophical Modernism*, and Fekete's *The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought*), de-

spite sometimes weak substantive similarities in their works and, at times, decidedly divergent aspects of their overall positions. Partly on the basis of the work of these intellectuals, a number of new groups of critics grew that provided one another with a public and a market, as articles comparing these approaches with one another were published. Feminist criticism, hermeneutic and postmodernist theories, psychoanalytic criticism, poststructuralism, semiotics, Marxism, structuralism, and deconstruction created an intellectual subculture in not only literature departments but also other interpretive fields such as communications and anthropology. Like Barthes's, Foucault's, Lévi-Strauss's, and Sartre's before his, Derrida's theoretical contribution could help legitimate the transition of "soft" disciplines from being *descriptive* enterprises to more *theoretical* ones. The reference to French intellectuals by theory-oriented groups in interpretive disciplines aided the legitimation of different traditions and standards of evaluation.

Second, the diffusion of deconstruction was facilitated because literary criticism had become a dominant subfield in language departments since the fifties and the hegemony of literary critics was already established (Alter 1984; Graff and Gibbons 1985). Because of its theoretical nature, literary criticism potentially had a wide audience, in contrast to phonetics, for instance. Third, deconstruction was an answer to a disciplinary crisis. The legitimacy of literature departments had been consistently weakened by the increased pressure for academic research oriented toward social needs. In this context, those departments tended to reaffirm the "distinctive features" on which their prestige was based, that is, high culture; a conversion to instrumental knowledge was excluded by the nature of their intellectual project. Derrida's trademark happened to embody these features and was promoted by elite departments and especially, as noted above, by departments that best embodied those features, such as Yale's. Also, like Foucault or Habermas, Derrida offered American humanists a criticism of science that was much needed to promote their own intellectual products.

## CONCLUSION

This study has been one step in the development of a grounded structural theory of the process of intellectual legitimation of interpretive theories. I have sought to demonstrate that the legitimation of a theory depends on both the producer's definition of his own work as important and the institutionalization of its importance by peers and the general intellectual public, as well as on a fit between the work and a structured institutional and cultural system. The legitimation of theories results more from a complex environmental interplay than from the intrinsic qualities of theo-

ries themselves. Theories cannot thus be considered in isolation, even if they are experienced through their own logic and in their own cultural realm by their producers and consumers.

In the first section, I suggested that features of Derrida's work contributed to its legitimation in France by (1) meeting existing cultural requirements through a distinctive writing style, a strong theoretical trademark, and a focus on questions central to the French intellectual milieu at the end of the sixties, and (2) favoring its diffusion by being ambiguous, adaptable, and packaged as a distinct product. His work was also integrated into an important intellectual tradition and presented a charismatic image of the intellectual. I have tried to argue further that Derrida's work helped its own institutionalization as an important contribution because he himself described it as answering fundamental questions, contributing to the project of important philosophers, and transcending classic philosophical work. I have also proposed that the fit between Derrida's work and upper-middle-class culture, the French political climate of the 1960s, and the disciplinary crisis of philosophy helped the diffusion of deconstruction theory in general.

In the second section, I emphasized that Derrida's institutional trajectory meets the institutional requirements of the French intellectual scene as defined by the trajectory of other intellectuals. I argued that Derrida's access to institutional settings and his participation in the structuralist debate helped in the diffusion of his work and its institutionalization as an important contribution. I contended that Derrida's participation in both *Tel Quel* and the structuralist debate shows that theoretical agreement is a condition of intellectual collaboration and of diffusion and that the institutional and cultural systems are interrelated, as are intellectual collaboration and institutional support. I contended that cultural capital affects access to institutions and that high-status cultural references are very effective as a basis of legitimation in interpretive disciplines. Finally, I argued that the diffusion of Derrida's work was improved by his ability to capitalize on the structure of the market by addressing his work to already constituted markets rather than to a shrinking philosophy public.

In the third section, I extended the discussion to propose that the legitimation of Derrida's work in the United States proceeded from its adaptability to the institutional and cultural features typical of the American scene, that is, its adaptation to intellectual debates and its diffusion by prestigious scholars and journals. The adaptability of Derrida's work, from being a criticism of structuralism for a large French public to one that interests mostly American literary critics, is one of the most important conditions of its success in these two quite distinct and, at times, divergent cultural markets. In order to be defined as important, theories have to be reframed so that they become understandable and relevant for

new audiences. The importance of this fit is clearly demonstrated by the lesser success of Derrida in the field of American philosophy. As with the diffusion of Derrida's work in France, the fit between the author's body of work and the structural characteristics of the American market were important, especially given the disciplinary crisis of literary criticism and the concurrent importation of Derrida's work and that of other French intellectuals in the mid-1970s.

There are important differences in the conditions of legitimation of Derrida's work in France and the United States, as the segmentation of the two intellectual markets differs considerably: in the United States, professional journals and institutions have an important influence on legitimation, while cultural journals have a minor role. In France, cultural journals cater to an important and influential public and further affect the legitimation of theories by controlling access to the market. Professional journals appear to be less influential than in the United States. However, it is important to note that the processes of legitimation of Derrida's work in France and the United States also have several common features, which might indicate the necessary conditions for intellectual legitimation in general. In both cases, institutional supports and intellectual collaborators were the *sine qua non* for intellectual legitimation, as is the fundamental fit between the work and its intellectual and cultural contexts.

More studies are needed in order to evaluate to what degree the process of legitimation of Derrida's work is unique and how it differs from other cases. A few similarities and differences between Derrida and other French philosophers might be pointed out here. On the one hand, Derrida's case seems to be exceptional in terms of the strength and intensity of his institutional support in one discipline in the United States, especially given the weakness of his support in other disciplines. This is confirmed by data on the diffusion of Barthes's and Foucault's work. Also, in contrast to Foucault's, Derrida's French and American publics seem to be more highly differentiated.

On the other hand, Derrida's work resembles other imported French interpretive works in several respects. Most of these are sophisticated cultural goods that might be used to increase the legitimacy of theoretically oriented scholars in the United States, and, in France, they can be displayed as high-status cultural goods by the upper-middle class. French intellectuals generally project an inspiring and often charismatic image of intellectual life (e.g., Culler 1983). Also, they have access to cultural magazines, participate in public debate, and locate their work at the juncture of several already constituted markets.

The similarities and differences among French intellectuals and between the legitimation processes of Derrida's work in France and the

United States suggest directions for future systematic studies of the process of intellectual legitimation of interpretive theories and for distinguishing between necessary and peripheral conditions to intellectual legitimation. Sociologists should also explore whether the smaller institutional resources available in interpretive disciplines affect normative control and consequently the degree of stability and structuration of the legitimation process in interpretive disciplines. Future studies would also do well to contrast the forms of cultural capital that are most influential in facilitating access to resources in interpretive and empirical disciplines.

#### APPENDIX: LIST OF SECONDARY SOURCES

##### Bibliographic

*Catalogue des publications périodiques universitaires de langue française* (1969–77).

*French XX Bibliography* (1968–77).

*Index Translation* (1968–75).

*Répertoire bibliographique de la philosophie* (1971–75).

##### On Teaching and Research Institutes

Centre national de recherche scientifique. *Annuaire des sciences de l'homme* (1979).

Centre national de recherche scientifique. *Rapport national de conjoncture* (1963–64).

Direction générale de la recherche scientifique et technique. *Répertoire national des laboratoires* (t. 3, 1974).

Ministère de l'éducation nationale. *Annuaire de l'éducation nationale* (1970).

Ministère de l'éducation nationale. *Rapport de l'agrégation de philosophie* (1958–78).

Ministère de l'éducation nationale. *Rapport du C.A.P.E.S. de philosophie* (1958–78).

##### On the Institutional and Intellectual Trajectories of Philosophers

Association amicale des anciens élèves de l'école normale supérieure. *Annuaire* (1979).

Cercle de la librairie. *Guide des prix littéraires* (1965–71).

*Current Biography* (1979).

Fondation nationale de science politique. *Annuaire des anciens de science politique* (1979).

*Literary and Library Prizes* (1972–78).

*Who's Who in France* (1979).

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### Periodicals

*Critique* (1963–79).

*Esprit* (1960–80).

*Nouvelle Revue française* (1963, 1973, 1977).

*La Pensée* (1974, 1979).

*Tel Quel* (1972–75).

*Les Temps modernes* (nos. 20, 27, 32, 64).

### General

Files of École normale supérieure, Archives nationale de France.

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