

Unpublished excerpt from Chapter 7 of the Ideology of Tyranny

Derrida vs. Foucault— A Fragment

At the *École Normale*—France’s State-factory of intellectuals—, Derrida (1930-2004) had been an “admiring and grateful disciple” of Foucault.¹ But after building a momentum of his own, he resolved to part from the master by reneging him in public, on the occasion of a lecture on the relation between Descartes and the history of madness. This took place in the mid-sixties. Directing his attack against *Madness and Civilization*, Derrida argued that to let “madness speak for itself” was the “*maddest aspect* [of Foucault’s] project.”¹ He had admired his teacher’s attempt to give Madness a voice, but to have given Madness, in the end, the tongue of *logic* was, in truth, to betray the very cause of the sacred insanity. Because Folly, as they all knew, was *silent*. And, truly, Derrida inveighed, it is when we want “to speak the madmen’s silence that we pass over to the side of the enemy, to the side of order, even if, within order, we fight it and question its origin.”¹ This wasn’t a disavowal of the Bataillean project, of course. It seemed rather a polemic driven by envy and rivalry. Wanting to break free of Foucault’s shadow, Derrida was accusing his teacher of not being Bataillean enough; he had stirred one of those classic back-stabbing incidents, whereby the junior runner-up defies the senior incumbent by disputing before the conclave the