



Why  
Philosophize?

Jean-François Lyotard

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Jean-François Lyotard

Translated by Andrew Brown

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# Acknowledgements

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## Editorial note

The translation follows a typed text preserved at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet (shelf mark JFL 291/2). This constitutes the second manuscript version of the lectures given by Jean-François Lyotard soon after they had been written. The Bibliothèque Doucet also preserves (shelf mark JFL 291/1) a first typewritten version of the same text – but one that is heavily annotated by Lyotard himself. All these annotations have been carried over, without modification or alteration, into the second typescript, so it has not been thought useful to point out the differences between the two versions. On the other hand, a few minor corrections have been made when they turned out to be necessary (punctuation mistakes, quotation marks missing); likewise, the quotations indicated by abbreviated references in the original text have been re-established. No notes have been added, so as to leave the oral character of these lectures intact.<sup>1</sup>

Corinne Enaudeau

<sup>1</sup> I have added a minimum of notes where I felt they were necessary. [Trans. note]

# Introduction

*Corinne Enaudeau*

Philosophy does not desire wisdom or knowledge; it teaches us neither what is true nor how to behave. People will say that it wears itself out wondering what it is - and *what is* - in a solitude that disturbs nobody. At best, it might sometimes offer us an idea useful for the production of wealth or the dream of a completely different social system or the metaphysical opium of consolation. Philosophers, it would seem, are those crazy chatterboxes whom history carts along with it throughout its history, without profit but without any great loss either. They may well interpret the world, but they stay standing at its door and will never change it. So their discourse may be interrupted, may return to silence, without the face of the world being changed. After all, their discourse has, in the final analysis, a single thread: a strange attachment to loss, the desire not to lose the loss that undermines all human activity and separates it from itself, the desire not to let go of the lack whose dagger death sticks into life. So, in 2012, we may well ask, as Jean-François Lyotard asked in 1964: why philosophize? What reason was there, is there still, to philosophize, to plunge back down into the depths of the gaps in meaning - each time anew, in a re-found naivety that will be judged childish? Put this way, the question may appear rhetorical. It is self-referential, since its utterance actually gives the answer to the question uttered, for we have already started philosophizing when we wonder whether it's worth the trouble to do so all over again. But it is the lot of language itself, which has to speak so as to worry about its own interruption; it is the lot of wakefulness and life, which must