



## **PRIMER EJERCICIO: SEGUNDA FASE**

### **TRADUCCIÓN DIRECTA INGLÉS-CASTELLANO**

PERFILES: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 y 6

#### **Mediarchy**

Storytelling as soft power

In French, there are two words for power: *puissance*, meaning the ability to act or make a difference; and *pouvoir*, meaning institutionalized, top-down authority. Spinoza made an analogous distinction in Latin, using the terms *potential* and *potestas* respectively. Yves Citton argues that only *potential* is real, while *potestas* is myth.

A Swiss literary theorist, cultural philosopher and media scholar, Citton has published widely in France on the interplay of Enlightenment thought, the ecology of attention and the modern political imaginary.

The author's privileging of *potential* marks this as a work of the "left", a term he presents in quote marks. Fundamentally, the power to shape our worlds lies not with governmental or religious institutions, but with the anonymous multitudes that subtly legitimate the organization of society through the soft power of shared desires and beliefs. Directing this process, for Citton, must take the form of storytelling. Top-down power is always an affair of the imagination. Only a myth – a story we tell ourselves and each other – could make money *money*, rather than mere paper notes or numbers on a screen.



Likewise, it is myths that give monarchy, democracy or capitalism the hard power that makes them real. For the author, there is no pre-existing order that would favour a particular social organization or hierarchy; the “left” begins and ends with the rejection of any divinity, sovereignty or appropriation by which we might make an inequitable state of affairs seem *given*. Nothing, Citton argues, is given. Everything is dreamt up in stories that do not point to ultimate realities so much as embody the contingent desires, beliefs and fears that shape us. The role of storytelling is all the more important in our current “mediarchy”, wherein the manipulation of image and narrative has become a prime engine of political control.

Trumpism, Brexit and the global authoritarian turn, all of which are fuelled less by policy or principle than by potent narratives of grievance, destiny and renewal, if nothing else, confirm Citton’s insight that stories, not facts, shape political reality in the so-called post-truth era and he notes that today’s “right” continues to be much more adept than anyone else at wielding the power of myths.

Myths degrade when they lose their connection to transcendence and devolve into mere rhetoric. By refusing any absolute on which to ground its myths, don’t the “left” and the “right” risk making its narratives feel arbitrary – no more than personal preferences? If Citton brackets “left” and “right”, is it not because these terms have outlived their usefulness, and the creation of a better world cannot occur without our affirming a real moral horizon that myths help us to discover?