

Introduction

Prophet: the one who speaks before

Movements in complex societies are disenchanting prophets. The charmed universe of the *heroes* has definitively dissolved under the impact of an era taking cognizance of itself as a planetary system riven by molecular change, as a system which constantly generates tensions and then in turn adapts to them by striving to control them. Movements are a sign; they are not merely an outcome of the crisis, the last throes of a passing society. They signal a deep transformation in the logic and the processes that guide complex societies.

Like the prophets, the movements 'speak before': they announce what is taking shape even before its direction and content has become clear. The inertia of the old categories may prevent us from hearing the message and from deciding, consciously and responsibly, what action to take in light of it. Without the capacity of listening to these voices, new forms of power may thus coalesce, though multiple and diffuse and no longer reducible to any linear and easily recognizable geometry.

Contemporary movements are prophets of the present. What they possess is not the force of the apparatus but the power of the word. They announce the commencement of change; not, however, a change in the distant future but one that is already a presence. They force the power out into the open and give it a shape and a face. They speak a language that seems to be entirely their own, but they say something that transcends their particularity and speaks to us all.

This book was born over the last twenty years as an attempt to listen to the voices and read the signs of precisely that which collective action is proclaiming. But the mind that sets about to regard the societal actors today must in a similar manner proceed within a disenchanting framework. The