was written because we need to extend our repertoire of problem-solving practices to deal with the complex, networked world we have created for ourselves. We do not have a moment to lose.

To begin, let's try to understand the nature of the problematic situations we find ourselves in by looking at three case histories from widely different domains.

CASE 1

The train to nowhere: On decision-making about public infrastructure

For years, a high-speed train link was being planned in Holland, a small and densely populated European country. This link would connect major cities like Rotterdam and Amsterdam to the pan-European high-speed train network that has been built over the last thirty years. The link was seen as strategically important for economic, social, and cultural reasons. Not joining the network would leave Holland relatively isolated—geographically, the country is just north of the main population centers of the European Union. The proud and sophisticated Dutch government apparatus braced itself for a long and difficult planning process: the adverse consequences for thousands of people living and working along the proposed train route were only too easy to imagine. Who would welcome the thought of a 450-ton steel monster racing through their backyard at 300 km/hour, every ten minutes or so? The impact of noise, ruined views, vibration, and property devaluation is potentially huge. In a more hierarchical country (with a higher "power distance" [Hofstede 1997, 2001]) or in a less crowded country, the planning of a new train link might not be a problem. But in this case it was. Impact studies were made, and years were spent in elaborate community consultation procedures. Forums were created so that everyone could have his or her say, all according to best practice in democratic government. All this was done in the belief that through these discussions rationality would prevail, and a consensus could be reached. But every time one of the proposed routes took the lead, local councils and citizen groups commissioned their own studies to show that the government's research was incomplete, or plainly wrong. While the tabled arguments were often plausible, the motivation behind them was, of course, the classic NIMBY: "Not In My Back Yard." The confusion that ensued from this proliferation of studies was exacerbated by the fact that by this time (the mid-nineties) the Internet