

# Endings

## Picking Fruit

Late January 2009. As I write this there is a mood of freshness come too early in my work life. New projects are in the air; new possible futures are being discussed. With this mood comes a tenuous but nonetheless palpable shift in the place this PhD occupies in my life. I find now that, for moments at a time, I can glimpse past its magnificent bulk to a time when it will be over. It is a dizzying thought: to be finished. I catch myself rehearsing moments of the future, concocting potent feelings of tearful relief and nostalgia; triumph and rootless loss. This early spring is not quite here but it is in the air.

The Lowcarbonworks project is coming to an end in July 2009. As a project we are preparing papers that might be published. One abstract I have written describes the analytical part of the work described in this thesis. I find myself writing quickly now. I rattle off in my abstract:

The analysis suggests that, far from being strategically or policy driven, innovative projects erupt dynamically when contextual factors meet capable coalitions that exhibit certain complex qualities, that include: actors' attitudes to risk, the flow of knowledge and trust and the ability to build capacity against shifting agendas.

E-mail to Peter, January 2009

Peter comments that he likes the sentence and when I look at it closely I can see in it my literature survey, the learning history interviews and the subsequent detailed analysis. So about three years of work then. No wonder I have something to say. Perhaps statements like this are the fruit of that garden I described at the start of the thesis. I can pick them off the branches now and just let them stand alone, knowing that behind them lies an edifice of painstaking research! This seems a good way to bring the thesis to a close. In a reflective mood, I recognise there is a harvest and am grateful for it.

# Reflections on this Presentational Form

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 I print out the whole thesis for the first time. The printer spews it out in the empty research room office that is stiflingly hot with a weak winter sun. I clip and staple and suddenly in an unexpected moment there it is. I flick through looking not at the words, but at the impact, the aesthetic of it. I like the font and the variation on the page. Plenty of pictures and mixed snippets – a bit like a scrapbook. It looks a little like a learning history and this was what I wanted. But this is just how it looks. When does that attractive kaleidoscopic quality spill over into being plain confusing? This is the tension with which I have had to work. It has been difficult to stick to my original ideas on presentation where I was motivated by ideas of congruence and elegance. Whereas congruence led me toward jagged switches between differently toned fragments in the writing, the advice, particularly from supervisors Peter and Geoff was that this was not elegant and that it was difficult for the reader. So I softened the switches, and removed some of my longer storied fragments. Then another reader, Jean, a fellow PhD researcher, said she loved those long stories. She lamented the loss of some from an earlier draft. Maybe I reached an in-between place that was neither brave enough to really make place for narrative nor decisive enough to exclude it altogether by working a more consistent tone through my main text. Or maybe, just like with any learning history, it depends on the reader. What is pleasing to some can be irritating to others.

So ironically when all is said and done I have found it difficult myself to keep faith with story. I have struggled to keep space for those expansive, fragments of experience in a dissertation like this where coming to the point and then making it is really what a PhD thesis is traditionally all about. The storied fragments, the digital story: these all delay this. Peter says he finds they are sometimes like a tease. They prolong the agony of waiting to find out just what it is I am saying. And yet I like them. I like the setting of at least some of the action in time and some of the characterisation. When I see this I know I am saying things in a different way – a richer, layered way. My different move is that I did not come to the clean point and that, in a way is the point. I imagine an unknown reader, someone like me, in the library who hauls out this thesis and is for a moment assured and encouraged by its messy humanity.