

PHILLIP

LABOR DAY [II]

So, the question is, now what?

The money I inherited is nearly gone; I'll need to start working again soon. I look into the future and I can see that I'll have a job by Christmas.

I still don't know what I want to do.

I wanted to accomplish something this year, and I did. I can sit here, in the room I call my office, and see the tangible evidence. The MiniDiscs are lined up in front of me, chronologically ordered. I can count them. I can take one off the shelf and hold it in my palm.

But I didn't want to do the interviews just for the sake of doing them. I did them because I wanted to learn something. I worked with them closely, hoping to discover whatever secret they had to yield. I listened to them over and over again. I transcribed them and cross-referenced them; I assigned keywords to them and filed them in a database and accessed them in new ways based on hidden connections. I transferred the recordings to the computer and cut them up into pieces. I effaced my questions from the interviews and saved only the answers, in folders named after the people who gave them. I instructed my computer to play random arrangements of answers back at me. It was a unique experience, listening my way through these interlocks of complaint and gossip and confession; it was like floating in some eternal breakroom without walls. I spent hours at a time in there, all the while feeling like I was getting closer and closer to something, some conclusion about the zeitgeist, I guess.

I learned some things. I did. If I were so inclined I could tidy up my findings, make them into a bullet-pointed list, something suitable for a slide in a PowerPoint presentation.

- People working in offices feel like their work isn't recognized
- People working in retail often feel antagonism towards both customers and management
- People have complaints about their jobs, but they develop strategies to make the time spent at work bearable

But these are banal, conclusions suitable for an annual report. What I wanted was something profound; an epiphany; something that would change me in the understanding; something that I could never go back to not understanding. Something that would tell me what to do.

I don't know what to do.

I miss you, mom. I miss you, dad.

Goodbye.