

Beginning in my twenties

I was in my early twenties, it was summer, and I was so young that when my phone broke, when the Internet was cut off, and the doorbell to the apartment building I was living in stopped working, I didn't bother to fix these things. In a very modern sense, I was completely cut off from the city I lived in, by my own choice and doing. If I wanted to see my friends I had to go to their houses to see if they were home or; if they weren't, I would go to the park to read and wait for them to return. I borrowed *Into the Wild* from a friend, read it in the park, borrowed that same friend's car for three days and drove out to the countryside, slept under a green tarp and continued reading *Into the Wild*, preparing coffee over an open fire. Maybe the book inspired me to do this. Maybe I was just bored being secluded while living in the city. Haphazardly, I wrote some lines in a note book, tore off the cover of *Into the Wild* and sent it to a friend; I had crossed out the title on the first page and written «the wild is not only where the trees grow». I didn't pay much attention to either the note book or the now torn-up copy of *Into the Wild*; I left all of it in a box, and these mundane objects were all but forgotten as I returned to the city, bought a new phone, and paid for my Internet to be turned back on.

It wasn't until years later that I realized that the rendition of McCandless' journey in *Into the Wild* and my own naive, three-day recreation of it had not escaped me, but, rather, subconsciously, they had served as a catalyst for thoughts and projects directly influenced by McCandless' story; projects that encompassed the broader themes of walking, pilgrimage, and experience. Later, when I included a physical copy of *Into the Wild* in an exhibition, together with a walking stick made during a walk in a Chinese mountain, along with Tibetan souvenirs, I realized that perhaps I had been unwilling—or unready—to confront the influence that *Into the Wild* had had on this project and the projects that came before it. Looking back, I invented reasons to justify the avoidance of McCandless' actions without critically engaging with his actions and my own connections to them; and the truth is that perhaps I feared what acknowledging *Into the Wild* as the source of inspiration would demand of me; that is, it would demand that my own story would have to be included into, not only the projects explicitly dealing with McCandless, but my own space within McCandless' narrative. Perhaps I feared becoming, or being perceived as just another empty character following the paths of someone else, performing a fanlike tribute to another's more noble actions; was I just simply a silly young dreamer in his twenties, avoiding the realities of everyday life? To consider taking the story of McCandless as a starting point, such a project would require strength and daring to move beyond—or outside—the simplistic dichotomy of «He's Crazy/he's my idol». For me, I would have to come to terms with the story in all its complexities, with McCandless' actions, while contributing something of my own, my own thoughts, questioning these thoughts, and through these endeavors be able to see the story and myself as parts of a collective contemporary mindset. To take but one example: what becomes of a young man who sleeps under a green tarp preparing coffee over an open fire for three days—for no other reason than the sleeping and burnt coffee.