

by Jessica Lynne

WAYFINDING, ONE: PATHS, CIRCULATION

“Topography, noun: a detailed description or representation on a map of the natural and artificial features of an area; a set spatial moment meant to represent a landscape that is otherwise moving; a snapshot. See also: family photographs.”

When you are young and trying to ascertain the limits of your world, the task feels herculean. There are places that you know are not your places, the *not here*, and yet rendering them beyond the abstract leaves you with an interesting conundrum. To whom might these other places belong? What are the conditions of their universe? Are those people, where they are, thinking about you?

In my own mind, as a child, this curiosity—of place defined by a present tense—led me to the pasts of people who were charged with my care. I wanted to see and hear and know those geographies that had given them shape, the shapes that I could now touch and hold onto while walking in the park or reading together at night or line dancing at a birthday party. How had they imagined this *now*?

WAYFINDING, FOUR: AMNESIA

Maybe this story is hard for you to imagine because you're not me.

Is this imagining connected to a sense of foresight? Maybe that's not the best question. Perhaps I should ask: is it an act of love to dream of a beyond, one outside of the place and time that is immediately tangible?

WAYFINDING, THREE: NODES

“A node is a point at which subsidiary parts originate. People make decision points at nodes in paths. As a result, nodes should contain graphic and architectural information to assist with those decisions.”

Jamaica Kincaid's novel *The Autobiography of My Mother* opens this way:

My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind.

This is not a sentiment of hope or forlornness or even despair. For Kincaid's protagonist, Xuela, this is just a matter of fixed position. A node from which she shall move forward, this recognition brings with it sets of decisions that route Xuela's way from childhood to old age. She negotiates the parameters of her life on a small island, first defined for her by an inattentive father and later renegotiated by Xuela herself for her own survival. She marks her way in the world by the horizon line or the distance from her father's house to the mouth of the river or by the quiet that settles in Roseau on a Sunday morning during church hours.

This novel is the last book I read in 2020, and I am writing about it here, in 2021, because I have returned to the place of my childhood only to be slightly disoriented by all that I had forgotten about this location. I have since begun to guide myself by the memories assigned to the many places where I once clung to the shapes of those previously charged with my care, places where I decided to release my grip. These are becoming my nodes.

WAYFINDING, TWO: MARKERS

“In wayfinding, a marker is an object that marks a locality. Markers such as arches, monuments, building entrances, kiosks, artwork, and natural features give strong identity to various parts of a site or building. They act as mental landmarks in the wayfinding process and break a complex task into manageable parts.”

There is the former church on Warwick Boulevard whose congregation has ballooned so much that the building where I first questioned the terms of my faith is no longer the building where the church even meets. There is the park near the air force base where I first realized what it meant to be disappointed by the fragile humanity of your parents. There is the water, at whose edge I stood desperately trying to see to the other side. To those other universes.

WAYFINDING, FIVE: AGNOSIA

I've been aiming towards a certain type of perfection . . .

This is to say that my present now belongs to a place that does not quite seem entirely like a place that was once my place. This is neither bad nor good—it simply is what it is. There are new points that dot this landscape in flux, and in this moment I am only dreaming of, hoping for, steadiness.

a practice in accompaniment