**Waves of Vacationland: Territorialism and Anxiety in the Unexpected Scene of Maine Surfing**

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When I formed a plan to study the Maine surf scene, my goals were far-reaching. I knew from nearly three years of surfing in Maine that the scene could be hostile, and I would need to be careful about how I gathered information in order to be successful. My purpose was to immerse myself in the localized culture to learn more about it. In my initial research proposal, I wrote that Maine and the practice of surfing are united by misconceptions. *Vacationland* is an oversimplification of Maine in the same way surfing’s perception as a leisurely summer activity is an oversimplification of the sport, and the lifestyle that goes with it. There’s a sense of ownership— of insidership— that comes with knowing that this isn’t the full story, about Maine and about surfing. Maine and surfing are both worlds of insiders, and where the two overlap in the Maine surf scene, the territorialism that takes shape is unique to any surf destination in the world. Insiders are skeptical of newcomers and protective of their land, their home, their waves, and their knowledge of all three. At the time when I planned my study of the Maine surf scene, I sought to immerse myself in the culture— to learn about locals by becoming one.

However, I executed this project in a much different world than the one I had planned it in. When I outlined my research plan in early February, COVID-19 was a blip amongst headlines in the news. The disease occupied a negligible space on the list of things I stressed about as a third-year college student. I had no idea the ways COVID-19 would change the world, the way we live, and the ways we planned for the future.

Over my 9 weeks of research, I wasn’t able to immerse myself and “become a local” of the Maine surf scene, but I was able to study how that scene fit into the new world I found myself living in. That world included surfing, and Maine, but it also included college, a pandemic, and a new set of uncertainties the people and institutions around me are still struggling to handle. COVID-19 made my initial research plan impossible, but it also revealed a connection between surfing and the perpetual present we now find ourselves living in. I knew that surfers— especially Maine surfers— always confront uncertainty: their methods for predicting waves are meticulous and backed by science, but they’re nowhere close to certain. Relying on predictions even days in advance is optimistic, and planning for waves weeks or months ahead is useless. Planning waves, I knew from the beginning, is much like planning life in a pandemic.

Instead of writing several essays about topics in Maine surfing, I wrote nine versions of one essay, in which I used my past experiences in the Maine surf scene to make sense of life in a pandemic. One version of this essay I am proud to have published online for WBUR, Boston’s branch of NPR. I am even more proud and grateful to have learned so much about writing and publishing from my terrific mentor, Alex Marzano-Lesnevich. With this project, I expected to learn the ins and outs of the Maine surfing world, but instead, I spent much of the summer learning the ins and outs of pitching and publishing as a freelance writer, learning practical skills that will directly help me in my career as a writer going forward.

Like much of the life I had planned for in early February, my research project went much differently than the way I planned it. But I am grateful for all of it, and especially for the ways writing, surfing, and the state of Maine has helped me through.

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