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"Preparing for Catastrophe on the Polar Frontier: An Antarctic Field Training Manual"

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From a distance, Antarctica invokes extreme imaginaries and possibilities. In the practice of everyday human Antarctic life, however, daily tasks and risks are heavily managed, mitigated, and overseen. To analyze the spectacular and mundane natures of human life in Antarctica, I will compare the paramilitary practicalities of Antarctic research station and field camp life with the visions of the Antarctic as a place of sublime wild nature, violent death, and climate disaster. Using three signature events in Antarctic field training—predeparture, orientation, and navigation—I consider how people visiting the Antarctic are trained to order their lives and work, especially in preparation for emergencies. Notions of risk, danger, and catastrophe hinge on the broader historical and cultural contexts of Antarctica as a frontier zone, making preparedness in the Antarctic gendered, militaristic, and highly ritualized. Finally, I compare climate catastrophe at a global scale—the other sort and scale of emergency Antarctic people are occupied with—with how traditional field preparedness maps onto this potential disaster. In field training, Antarctic people counter the tropes of wild nature with extreme and exaggerated performances of bureaucracy; this analysis, then, considers the generative potential of technocratic practices in the face of the Anthropocene, an environmental expression of human triumph and disaster. Practicing risk management requires practices of embodiment as well as literal and figurative orientations to potential hazards. (Text from author's abstract)

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