

VISIONS ON THE HIDDEN FACE OF THE EARTH: PERSPECTIVE OF THE EXPLORER – OBJECTIVE OF THE COACH

Henriet Jean-Pierre

Renard Centre of Marine Geology (RCMG), Universiteit Gent, Krijgslaan 281, S8,
9000 Gent, Belgium

E-mail: jeanpierre.henriet@ugent.be

1857: Eduard Suess inaugurates his course in geology in Vienna. In 1878, he undertakes his magnum opus, 'Das Antlitz der Erde', 'The Face of the Earth'. In his earlier, most influential booklet 'Die Entstehung der Alpen', he had transported the reader mentally to the top of an Alpine peak. In 'The Face of the Earth', Suess invites the reader to imagine himself to be a visitor from space, pushing aside the clouds to contemplate the global scene of continental structures. The ocean realm, however, would still remain veiled by a thick cover of clouds, for decades. In his 'Bathyfolages' (1954), Théodore Monod would playfully evoke the cloud screen, in debating the fragmentary sampling through sounding and dredging.

1937: Auguste Piccard designs FNRS 2. After WW II, he resumes work with Cosyns. High time for me to get born. Man's voyage to the 'Hidden Face of the Earth' begins. I would miss the FNRS 2 taxi, but get in time to join Jacques Piccard in diving with 'Forel', and to dive with 'Nautilé' in Fracture Zone Kane, 4650m deep, through the Earth's crust – into the Earth's mantle. Jules Verne's 'Voyage au Centre de la Terre' and 'Vingt mille lieux sous les mers' in one promotional ticket.

1957: Sputnik! Gagarin follows, remembering Suess. The International Geophysical Year heralds Global Earth Science. Tack: Space and the Antarctic. June '59: at the end of my school year I am awarded exciting books: 'Verovering van de diepzee', 'Jagers voor de wetenschap'. Cinema Capitole features a free access documentary, sponsored by BP: rugged Sno-cats cross the Antarctic, shooting seismics with big dynamite blasts. Thrilled, I write to BP, and get in return a letter of two pages narrating exploration seismics. An exploration geophysicist is born, keen to hunt for science, from abyss to pole. Public outreach works. My first paper – ocean drilling – gets published in Iris, our school journal (1962, IF: 0, citations: 0).

1967: Plate Tectonics move out of abyss. All geology books have to be re-written.
1977: Zeebrugge harbour development leads our first steps in marine seismics.
1987: Belgium returns to the Antarctic. Tack: due South. RCMG is born.
1997: Margin Research gets momentum under MAST – discovery of the 'Belgica' carbonate mounds in Europe's Western Frontier. 'Geosphere-Biosphere Coupling Processes' (IOC) move to the foreground. 'Biosphere'... a word coined by Suess.

2007: while the IGY 1957-1958 had unveiled the Antarctic realm, the International Polar Year (IPY) 2007-2008 largely polarizes interest on the Arctic. The melting of the ice cover unveils the last 'Hidden Face of the Earth'. Science and Industry move in fast. Visionary vessel projects, like 'Aurora Borealis', break through sceptis. For young

scientists in Ocean and Polar Science, both an area and an era of exciting training through research opportunities are luring. Tack: due North.