

# Antarctica: White heart of the Earth

Lucia Simion

Foreword by Jean-Louis Etienne

Antarctica has that force of attraction of the inaccessible which impels Man to passionate endeavors, and this magnificent book is the illustration of all these passions: artistic, human, scientific, political....

The Antarctic Treaty, which was approved at the end of the International Polar Year 1957-58 right in the middle of the Cold War, has made the continent of the South Pole a land of peace dedicated to science. The principal goal of this treaty was to ensure for the future of humanity that the Antarctica would always be occupied for peaceful ends and would never be a subject of dispute. Since the signing of the treaty and its extension in 1991, territorial claims have been halted, all military and nuclear activities are forbidden, and the researchers must exchange their results. The Madrid Protocol relative to the protection of the environment forbids the exploitation of all potential resources until 2048.

Antarctica is the only continent where the world's countries have overcome their national ambitions and succeeded in establishing a model of planetary government.

Far from the world, Antarctica is the observatory of the impact of human activities upon the Earth. It is there that the hole in the ozone layer was observed for the first time in the very high atmosphere, that the bubbles of air imprisoned in the ice revealed the action of our civilization upon the climatic change, that the aerial nuclear tests have been carved into the glacial stratum. The South Pole is a sentinel of planetary environment.

Sanctuary of a nature which has greatly extended its speciation, Antarctica is home to species which have adapted remarkably to the cold, to the wind system, to the distances which have to be covered to find resources, to the starkness of the reproduction areas exposed to all weather and to predators, to the shortness of summer which means having to quickly raise one's progeny before the arrival of winter. For millenniums, these polar species have been successful in the biological gamble of implanting themselves at the very frontiers of life, those frontiers which today we have transgressed. But let us take care, for the species in this formidable country are vulnerable.

Those who have adventured there know that no one ever comes back the same after a long journey on the white continent. In that extreme isolation, forced to pass one's time with oneself, one's reference points change, one tames the abysses of solitude. This is perhaps the key of the paradox of the irresistible attraction for the polar regions, however inhospitable, this intimate encounter with oneself. This world of ice where the sublime and the terrifying are violently mingled together has brought to light heroes, painters, writers, and today, photographers, whose works nourish the popular imagination and the most beautiful dreams of childhood.

With her sensitivity, her luminous vision, her passion for Antarctica, Lucia Simion takes us with her into the intimacy of this world where one can never be more than a passer-by. Antarctica is not a continent for Men, it is a continent for the Earth.

Jean-Louis Etienne