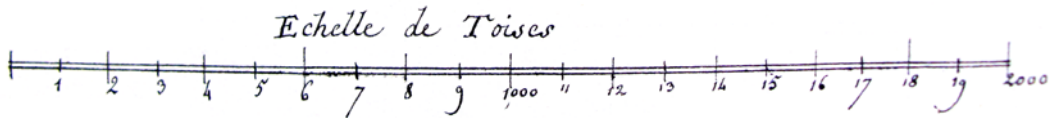


The Incremental Coast

J. R. Carpenter

between the ship and the quay
lies two metres of incompressible ocean

two metres of light between the edge
of the sea and the horizon



our labours commence at sunrise
and do not terminate until night

every precaution is taken
to guard against errors

by calculations I arrive
at the exact number of months

I will have to endure this island
before a ship will be sent to search



already ___

I am ___

cramped ___

by these ___

small ___

divisions ___

of time ___



the coast establishes a sort of islet
within common human relation

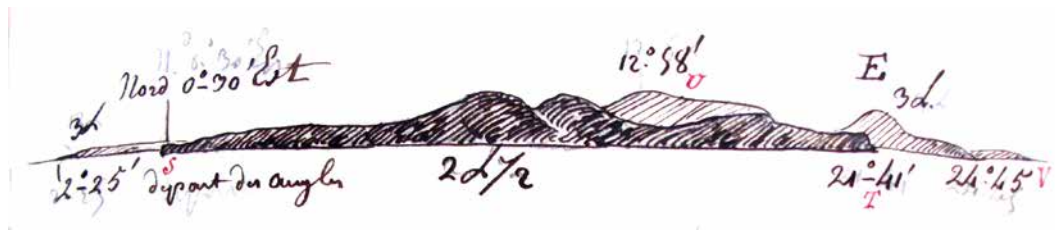
the months leave their notches on me
the island has no need of me

you want something to happen
and nothing does

what happens to the coast
does not happen to the discourse

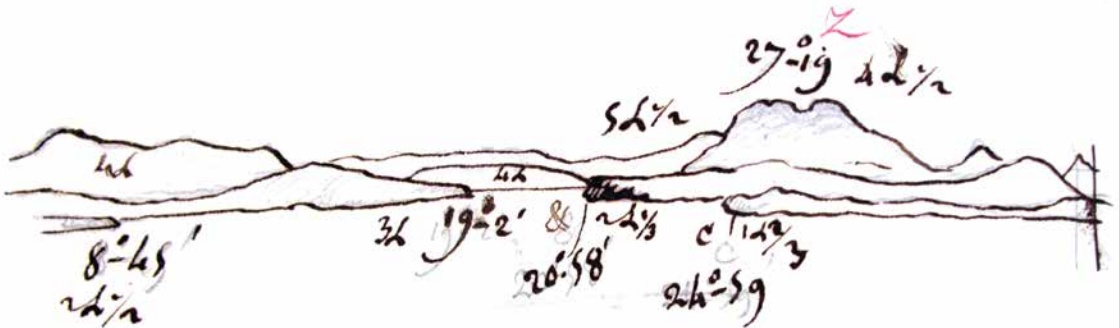
like a cork on the waves
I remain motionless

boredom is not far from bliss:
it is bliss seen from the shores of pleasure



those who have never been afloat
cannot be aware

of the inaccuracies arising
from the slight errors that creep into charts

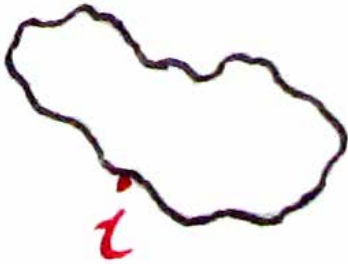


on a rock that dominates the sea
a metre is divided into centimetres

the Pacific could be measured on it
to within a millimetre

carved in letters
of five centimetres in height

the beginning of a phrase ...
I AM



I am the Controller of Weights and Measures
I am not necessarily captivated by the coast of pleasure

I am no longer anything
but an eye

The preceding text “The Incremental Coast” is an excerpt of *The Pleasure of the Coast: A Hydrographic Novel*, a web-based work commissioned by the “Worlds, interfaces and environments in the digital age” research group at Université Paris 8, in partnership with the cartographic collections at the Archives Nationales in Paris. This work asks questions about how the technology of the ship made the world measurable and thus navigable for western imperialism.

The title and much of the text in this work is borrowed from Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), with the word “text” replaced with the word “coast” throughout. Barthes' détourned philosophy intermingles with scientific writing and images from a collection of sketches of coastal elevations and drafts of sea charts drawn by Charles-François Beautemps-Beaupré during a voyage for discovery to the South Pacific in the late eighteenth century. These unattributed and often indistinguishable voices are in turn interrupted by excerpts from a third textual entity: *Suzanne and the Pacific*, a symbolist novel by Jean Giraudoux (1921), in which a young French woman becomes shipwrecked on an island in the region of the Pacific charted by Beautemps-Beaupré.

Eveli Hau'ofa (1994) notes that Europeans, on entering the Pacific after crossing huge expanses of ocean, tended to see “islands in a far sea” rather than “a sea of islands,” drawing “imaginary lines across the sea, [and] making the colonial boundaries that confined ocean peoples to tiny spaces for the first time.” *The Pleasure of the Coast* blurs these colonial boundaries by calling attention to the moment they were drawn. It disorganizes the islands carefully recorded by Beautemps-Beaupré, turning them into a variable font for use in the writing of willfully impossible word archipelagoes. It also grapples with the post-digital world we live in, in which invisible layers of data inform our daily thoughts and actions; a more-than-human world, of vast oceans and ceaseless winds.

—J.R. Carpenter