



# BIRU

## A WALK WITHOUT A SCORE

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ART WORKS ISOLDE UENROOY

An archive has a reluctant home in my head. This spongy archive is populated by all the books I read (or misread), movies I saw (whose plots I might have twisted), all those walks and getting lost in foreign mega-cities, sex with B. (they were murdered), arguments with A. (who died of cancer), the beating I took on tram 14, the countless beds I slept in, the intoxicating techno at Elephant Night, the tedious poems I wrote and re-translated (or mistranslated), the fabulations I was told by my grandmother, the green papaya I voraciously ate as a snack, all the art I have ever witnessed on different continents...

It's an archive without Borgesian custodians, without a search engine owned by Alphabet, without Dewey's decimal system, without members browsing their way round and round, which, however, doesn't mean that once some experience is stored away in some subterranean vault of the archive it will remain locked up; it certainly can resurface and color – traumatize – a present. The archive that parasitizes this head speaks in a multitude of tongues...

It's a leaky archive; spillage discolors the past to colonize a present and a future. And yet the archive keeps on absorbing all of this and that – disregarding any desire to systematize. This archive is an indiscriminate sponge. How to rinse this sponge? Can it be uploaded to web 3.0 for a second life?

I arrive in the quaint town of E. and it is time to leave my head to alight the train.

I step onto the platform and I am surrounded by voices, body odor and different shades of gray (are the locals chromophobes?). I navigate my way through these bodies in transit towards an exit. I leave the station and enter the city, a city I haven't visited in decades. Not wanting to rely on my sense of direction, instead I turn for assistance to Google Maps.

A British lady tells me where to go. She mispronounces street names – she butchers them, so to speak – but I get the gist. And I walk. I cross a square of sorts and enter a street with shops left and right. I make a right turn after the lady tells me to do so. A brisk walk it is. Lots of people are around and about – some with purpose, others are aimlessly wandering. The weather is fine, yet I am cold, I am always cold in this country. I take a wrong turn and the lady is recalibrating. I backtrack. And after approximately thirty minutes I arrive at my temporary destination.

Kopi hitam and kue-kue await. The kue-kue is home-made, so I'm told. The kue-kue is lovely, the kopi is bold. [I can't for the world recall what we talked about, but we exchanged stories while we were enjoying our drinks and pastry.] She proposes to give me a guided tour through her exhibition but I request I tour the show first on my own, in silence.

Wads of paper are on the floor near the entrance of the exhibition space. A space that's flooded with light, light that enters through an enormous window at the far end of the space. And I'm mesmerized:

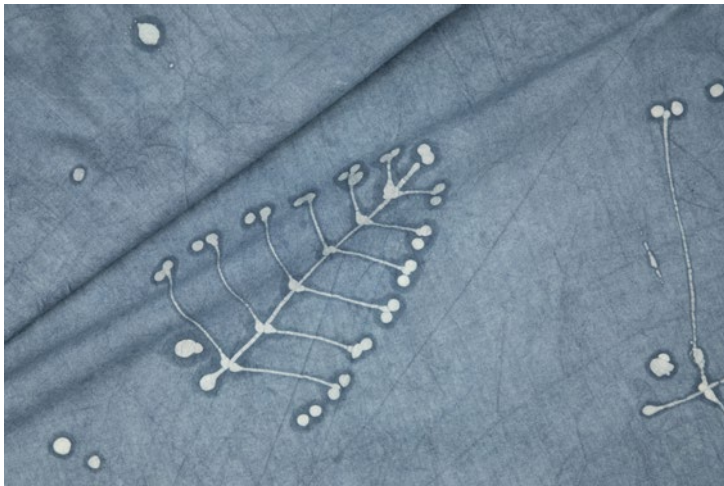


a large blue tarp-like object – is object a fitting word? – hangs from a beam, as if it is laundry drying in the sun. I enter and I am enclosed by the two sides of this blue entity offering a safe haven.

I leave this dwelling to continue my walk. I tread slowly, I look even more slowly. I see a spongy cake, a cake of the same greenish color as the one I just consumed – I look and look and look. I step back. I turn around and around again. I lean against the window and allow my eyes to travel. I listen carefully to the stories on display.

I walk towards a giant book, a family album – (auto)biographical?, fictional?, does it matter? could it be both? – and flip through the pages and try to make sense of it all, attempt to assemble a narrative out of the crumbs.

Next we tour the exhibition once more together. She fills in some gaps, she shows works I had overlooked – a video in a closet, for example –, she offers new clues, different ways of seeing. My head is filling up with commas – I'm satiated, for now.



I leave E. by bus – for some reason this city reminds me of the writer and librarian Georges Perec, especially his *Species of Spaces* – and it is time to depart. I put on my headphones and play *naik angin* by *ila*, my mind wanders off the map, into a quagmire, my head heavy, I see lilies...

Roy Voragen

This text is an impression from memory of my visit to [Isolde Venrooy's](#) solo exhibition *r-e-s-p-o-n-g-e* at [De Fabriek](#) in Eindhoven on September 16, 2022 (at the time of writing – early January 2023 – I did not consult any publications, on- or offline, to check whether my memories were in fact factual).

[Roy Voragen](#) is a poet and curator.



#### Glossary

# Biru is Indonesian for blue ([elsewhere](#) I used the pre-colonial Tagalog word *bughaw*).

# The subtitle is a reference to the book *Walking from Scores*, which is edited by Elena Biserna, and the book includes a handful of performance scores by Isolde.

# The phrase 'Borgesian custodians' is a reference to the story "The Library of Babel" by Borges (Babel alludes to the biblical time when we all allegedly spoke the same language. We mere mortals were punished for our hubris and the damnation called for the birth of a multitude of languages and misunderstandings).

# Kopi is Indonesian for both coffee and copy, in this context it refers to coffee; hitam is Indonesian for black; kue-kue is Indonesian for pastry.

# E. is a reference to the novel *A Void* by Georges Perec in which he doesn't use the letter 'e' (the technical term for this strategy: lipogram).

# Naik is Indonesian for going up; angin is Indonesian for wind; naik angin means to lose your temper. [Naik Angin](#) is the debut album of performance artist *ila* (she is from Singapore and she speaks Malay (and English)).

# The technical term for sourcing elements from languages different from one's mother tongue is called *exophony* (with a caveat: English isn't my native language).

