

Familiar Faces in Other Places

words & photos by Mariel Victoria Mok

I had flown across the Atlantic and in the October cold found myself standing at a corner in Oxford Circus. As I was waiting to cross the street, a girl from my secondary school cycled right by me. She was on a blue bike and I couldn't stop staring at her blue hair as I watched her curve around and disappear into the distance. I went to secondary school with that girl. I knew things about her: she was a prefect; she played on the netball team, she lived in Serangoon, or something. Four years later she was the girl with blue hair cycling right by me as I waited at a cross-light in London. That's crazy if you think about it.

The universe is expanding at a rate we cannot keep up with. There are seven billion – seven billion – people in the world, seven billion people with lives and thoughts and dreams and worlds of feeling. This fact strikes me as insane, a truism suddenly endowed with great magic and wisdom. The world is growing at a rate we cannot keep up with but it is now tinier than ever. I think about odds and probability but I can't count chance and I can't calculate coincidence. A girl who once moved through the same hallways as me cycles right by, miles from those hallways, and there's no reason why. I travel to see everything there is to see, to turn all the spaces out there into real places, and to reduce the number of strangers in the world. I want new songs and new buildings, look for new crowds to walk alone in, fall in love with new people, but still find it more incredible to see a familiar face in another place.

My first year in New York, two friends who were also studying on the east coast came to visit. We had known each other exactly half our lives, and as they were putting on their boots at the doorway of my apartment, I thought about the time we all took the bus to Orchard to watch *What a Girl Wants*. Thinking about our parents making small talk before sleepovers and the team games we played at birthday parties, the city changed for me that night. Whenever I meet Singaporeans abroad, I realise the expanding universe, the places that we travel to – the places that are not home – can feel strangely like home. 🌐

Mariel is a photography and philosophy major at Tisch School of the Arts in New York. She needs a pretty substantial dose of magic and wants a different mystery. You can find more of her work at www.marielmok.com.





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