

Unfinished Business

1/7

Maria Santos

August 2008 – Tuesday, 15:00.

A dark blue room in a public building.

A velvety blue chair in an empty room, four computers
and four pink chairs.

I'm cold in a crowded space with no one in sight in a blue room

Looking and listening.

Faint music through walls.

It's U2, I recognize it.

So long...

And my notes. Old notes from a while ago waiting on my folder,
on my pad, on my lap.

That was it: Phoenix, Arizona. A blue Chevy.

September 2001 – also Tuesday, Morning, around 09:00.

A clear sunny day.

A neatly packed case.

A footprint in the desert.

'A real war.'

'A real war with gangs.'

'A real war with gangs to usher in a new era.'

This is the future. Now. Today.

2/7

Me watching pictures on a black and white screen.

Unable to see colour.

In the desert I cannot see colour.

'Houston. Tranquillity base here.'

A footprint indented on the tranquil earth.

Then onto the walls. Then onto the flesh.

No signal yet on the mobile.

Houston is blurry, static.

Replaced by New York in colour.

Its pictures in black and white. Its fear loud and clear.

Late Morning, around 11:00.

I tried to call home several times but I'm stuck.

My precise plan breaks down.

NASA

A historical movie.

Another footprint. A dead one.

'Somebody is upside down.'

'...that you're upside down.'

'You cats take it easy on the lunar surface.'

Hardly any traffic all the way.

Still no signal.

Tuesday, 15:05.

3/7

'So long...' Still ringing.

What an unusual building, empty whilst full of noise.

Signs everywhere around me. Across this blue room.

Thick with meaning.

'The ultimate Star Trek aficionado's wet dream with
a Klingon Chronicle.'

Maybe not... but sounds intriguing.

Yet every note, every sound, every smell takes me inexorably
back in time.

A time to write.

Afternoon, around 12:30.

Big ruins.

'Casa Grande,' the book says.

Silence as we walk amongst them.

Lots of sun.

'They apparently shot dead the residents.'

'You got a bunch of guys about.'

'These people are heroes.'

It's still hot. So unbearably hot.

The papers conclude.

Apparently the community is helpless.

I am sorry for the USA.

I am sorry for myself.

'That's one small step for man and...'

3/7

Such a thing to remember at this time in the middle of the desert.

No signal.

No phone line anywhere.

Afternoon, around 14:30.

We left Phoenix under a big black cloud.

Our meticulous route abandoned.

And this is what I remember, the unimportant, the trivial,
the plainly stupid.

'At 1:47 p.m. EDT, July 20, the Lunar Module "Eagle" landed.'

'I think you've got a fine looking machine there.'

'The photographs are meant to promote peace.'

Maybe it is all important.

God will protect.

Shame I don't believe.

At Saguaro East we photographed cacti, but I can only remember
one other type: cholla.

A Silver Wedding Anniversary.

A celebration.

Tuesday, 15:10.

Still more signs around me, in front of me, on the windows,
on the tables, on the walls:

'Mythology', 'Intellectualism', 'Tachometry'.

Echoes bouncing back and forth: clink, clonk. 'So long'

5/7

'At 1:02 p.m. UK, Friday August 22nd 2008. Accessed Article.'

'Women are heroes in Brazil favelas.'

'The everyday life for women in Brazil, in this dangerous surrounding.'

'He snapped them with his 28 mm lens.'

How do you make sense of it all?

Inside a plain room. Blue.

Killings in the slums in Brazil. The essence of progress.

Paralysed footprints.

An absence.

Evening, around 19:00.

The Westin at Tucson made us feel welcome.

'A Meteorite impact and a footprint.'

'Cambodia, Laos and Morocco will follow Brazil.'

'We're breathing again.'

'Drug traffickers or militias?'

Will a photograph do?

Film footage? A few words?

The final outcome.

A footnote.

We sat in the empty restaurant. Everyone had left.

Who wants to chat with me?

Finally: a phone line.

Late Evening, around 20:30.

6/7

I fell asleep waiting for the food to arrive.

'A compulsive neatness.'

'An uncluttered sense of order.'

'A celebration postponed.'

Must be jetlag.

Maybe tomorrow.

Small pieces of paper stained with indistinct crawling lines
take me nowhere.

'For millions of years, a photograph on the front of a wall
in a city slum.'

'For millions of years, a footprint on the moon.'

'Faces have been seen. The sheer size of the images ensures it.'

'The Eagle has landed; but Neil meant to say, "A small step
for a man."'

Unlikely.

'A compulsive neatness.'

'An uncluttered sense of order.'

'A celebration postponed.'

My footprint. My footnote.

The notes fall from my lap to the floor and then scatter on the clean,
thick blue carpet.

'So long...' a hollow echoing.

7/7

Started 11 September 2001 at around 21:00. Finished 26 August 2008
at 15:30 more or less.

This story was written during the Science Museum's Listening Post short story workshops with Tony White, Science Museum writer in residence for summer 2008. Fragments of text from the following sources were cut-up and remixed by the author to create a completely new story:

Neil Armstrong,

(Mar 17, 2006, 7:34 pm), SPEECHES,
Astronaut Neil Armstrong's Speech on the Moon, 1969 – Apollo 11.
Available at: http://www.classbrain.com/publish/printer_117.shtml
Accessed: 23/08/2008.

Author unknown,

'Women Are Heroes In Brazil Favela,' Sky News, 22.08.08.
Available at: http://video.news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/Women-Are-Heroes-Artist-Displays-Photographs-On-Front-Of-Houses-In-Brazil/Article/200808415084674?lpos=World_News_Article_Related_Content_Region_8&lid=ARTICLE_15084674_Women_Are_Heroes%3A_Artist_Displays_Photographs_On_Front_Of_Houses_In_Brazil
Accessed: 23/08/2008.

Mark Hansen & Ben Rubin,

'*Listening Post*, Science Museum, London.
Viewed: 26/08/2008

Maria Santos,

Personal Travel Diaries,
11 September 2001

© Maria Santos, 2009

Maria Santos works with video sculpture dealing with the notion of space as a repository of memory, with exhibitions on her own and in collaboration with 36degrees theatre company. As an author, she has published short stories in literary journals as well as articles for several UK and International Art and Travel publications.