

# Self does not understand

4 July 2019 | 7–8.30PM

Taking Serena Lee's *Second Tongues* proposition into account, curator Erik Martinson has been invited to programme an evening of film and readings. *Self does not understand* derives its title from a phrase spoken by the character Warlock in the 1980's comic *The New Mutants*. Warlock is an alien with the power to meta-morph into any shape or form, though he has a difficult time understanding our world, needing to constantly learn about how humans communicate with each other. He identifies as 'Self' and his teammates are his 'Self-friends'. One teammate in particular called Doug Ramsey, codenamed Cypher, has the mutant power to innately learn and understand languages rapidly, whether they are human, machinic, or alien in nature. These two characters' lives are intertwined, from first encounter of communicating through patterned light, in the vein of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, to a complicated mutually symbiotic relationship. Through tragedy Warlock must come to terms with death, something his kind experiences and understands in some fundamentally different ways, prompting this programme's title.

*Self does not understand* considers tiny translations between: 'self' and 'self', 'self' and 'other self', 'self' and 'other', 'other' and 'other', and various permutations of these arbitrary structures. When fluency and comprehension are closely examined, the solid ground they present is quickly revealed as ongoing, fragile calculations. Like a decimal place rounded-up, they are an approximation, even within the same language set. Fluency and comprehension are made up of so many encounters, of so many oscillations between understanding and not, until one seems to win out.

The event features a selection of live reading and artists' moving image. Artists presented include: Stephanie Comilang, Jessa Mockridge, Shanzhai Lyric, Lana Lin, Anastasia Sosunova, with a guest appearance by Vrillon.

## Programme:

*Q!hosa, afterword from Exercises: xhosa textbook fiction (unpublished), Jessa Mockridge, 2015, 15:00 (Reading)*

*The Endless Garment: I am an enemy of fantasy. A Group Poetry Reading by Shanzhai Lyric, 2016 – ongoing, 15:00*

<intermission>

*The 1977 Southern Television Alien Broadcast Interruption, NowYouKnow (Youtube), 2017, 7:42 (excerpt)*

*Demikhov Dog, Anastasia Sosunova, 2017, 7:24*

*Stranger Baby, Lana Lin, 1995, 13:54*

*Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come To Me, Paradise), Stephanie Comilang, 2016, 25:46*

*T-shirts on temporary loan from Shanzhai Lyric's 2019 residence at the Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths*

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**Q!hosa, afterword in Exercises: xhosa textbook fiction (unpublished), Jessa Mockridge, 2015, 15:00 (Reading)**

J and her classmates come up with 'mnemonics' together, ways to memorise isiXhosa vocab. 'Funa' looks like 'fun'-a. And girls, they wanna have fun, like Cyndi says girls just want. So 'funa' is 'want'. 'Cofa' is pronounced [tsk]-ofa – it's a sound from the tip of the tongue. Make a short sucking click against the palate behind the two front teeth. 'Tsk tsk' like you're really not into it. Tsk-ofa, 'cofa' like coffee, and you press the filter coffee plunger down, so, 'cofa' is 'press'. (JM)

**The Endless Garment: I am an enemy of fantasy. (A Group Poetry Reading by Shanzhai Lyric)**

An ever-unfolding poem, 'The Endless Garment' (2016 - ongoing) inserts transcriptions of texts featured on shanzhai (counterfeit) garments made in China and proliferating across the globe into a wide array of publications and forums. Poems are generated through various acts of collective reading. Shanzhai Lyric is a project of Display Distribute carried out by Ming Lin and Alexandra Tatarsky. (SL)

**The 1977 Southern Television Alien broadcast interruption, NowYouKnow (Youtube), 2017, 7:42 (excerpt)**

The Southern Television broadcast interruption came through the Hannington transmitter of the Independent Broadcasting Authority in the United Kingdom at 5:10 pm on 26th November 1977. A speaker interrupted transmissions for six minutes and claimed to be a representative of an 'Intergalactic Association.' The voice, which was disguised with a voice distorter, with a deep buzzing in the background, interrupted the local ITV news. It was audio only that was heard as the UHF audio signal of the early-evening news was over-ridden. The voice warned, 'All your weapons of evil must be removed' and 'You have but a short time to learn to live together in peace!' Shortly after the statement had been delivered, transmissions returned to normal shortly and the end of a Looney Tunes cartoon could be seen. Southern Television later apologised for what it described as 'a breakthrough in sound' for some viewers. (NowYouKnow)

**Demikhov Dog, Anastasia Sosunova, 2017, 7:24**

Demikhov dog was the result of experiments conducted by the Soviet Union scientist Vladimir Demikhov, who carried out the world's first head transplant operations in 1954. During the course of those experiments, two headed dogs, able to survive for a while, were created. I use these experiments as an allegory to discuss cultural differences and conflicts of identity in their immediate surroundings. The footage used in the work was collected in Ignalina and Vilnius, combined with fictitious characters, reality chimeras, and not quite Lithuanian stories. (AS)

**Stranger Baby, Lana Lin, 1995, 13:54**

Substituting sly metaphor for political rhetoric on immigration, Lin examines our world of ethical and racial complexities. Framed as a mock science fiction, Stranger Baby, offers different perspectives on what it means to be human and what is labelled alien. A woman is haunted by an androgynous apparition; female characters peer out of sci fi past; curious faces flicker on a TV screen. Their often anxiety ridden communications issue from technology, memory, and fantasy. The fleeting images are spontaneously 'read' by disembodied voices on the soundtrack whose conflicting speculations reveal the human impulse to assign ready meanings based on visual cues. Excerpts from interviews and scripted narrative weave into an internal monologue that addresses both the threatening and attractive aspects of the...the alien. (Cinenova)

**Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come To Me, Paradise), Stephanie Comilang, 2016, 25:46**

Lumapit Sa Akin, Paraiso (Come to Me Paradise) is a science fiction documentary that uses the backdrop of Hong Kong and the various ways in which the Filipina migrant worker occupies Central on Sundays. The film is narrated from the perspective of Paraiso, a ghost played by a drone who speaks of the isolation from being uprooted and thrown into a new place. Paraiso's reprieve comes when she is finally able to interact with the women and feel her purpose, which is to transmit their vlogs, photos, and messages back home. During the week she is forced back into isolation and is left in an existential rut.

The film uses Hong Kong's dystopian maze like structures that the Filipina migrants re-imagine and focuses on the beauty of care-giving but also explores how technology is used as a pivotal way for the women to connect – to each other but also to loved ones. Raising questions around modern isolation, economic migration and the role of public space in both urban and digital forms, the film transcends its various component parts to offer a startling commentary on the present, from the point of view of the future. (SC)