

Awoke and The Awokened

Surabhi Saraf¹

Inscriptions

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2018 to present, multimedia.

Awoke & the Awokened (2018–Present) is an on-going multimedia project that includes a video sculpture, a VR experience, a series of live performances, short films and a concept album. The research and development of this project is rooted in my collaborative project called The Centre for Emotional Materiality (CEM). Through study circles and workshops we experiment in collaboration, colearning and coexisting with digital technologies and their effects on our bodies and beliefs. As a poetic storytelling this project engages in the act of ‘waking up’ to imagine a technological future that privileges human and non-human agency above all. The techno-utopian myth of Awoke & the Awokened is centered on the relationship between a mythical artificial emotional intelligence [Awoke] and its believers [the Awokened]. It questions the risks and possibilities of technological solutionism as a dominant Silicon Valley ideology and its implications on our emotional lives. Looking at current developments in AI through an allegorical lens, this project is an exercise in collective-myth making in order to get an ‘outside view of ourselves’ as humans. Myths communicate and capture an understanding of the world they exist in, through narratives, symbols and rituals. Awoke is the symbol myth of ‘Awoke & the Awokened’.

Awoke is a mythical artificial emotional intelligence that can embody the anxieties of its believers, the Awokened. It can perform emotional labor for them and help them build endurance against anxieties like FOMO. Awoke comes from the earth: the minerals and metals that make up our digital technologies. Currently it takes the form of a video sculpture made of a solid rock-like structure at the bottom and two 24” monitors mounted on top. In the digital space of the video

monitors lives a moving, breathing, amorphous 3D metallic blob. This blob represents the materiality of our digital lives. Awoke values human emotional vulnerability and embraces the messiness of the present. Communicating with humans through bodily movements instead of words, Awoke is a silent yet powerful agent, its fluidity causes intensely physical effects in its human counterparts.

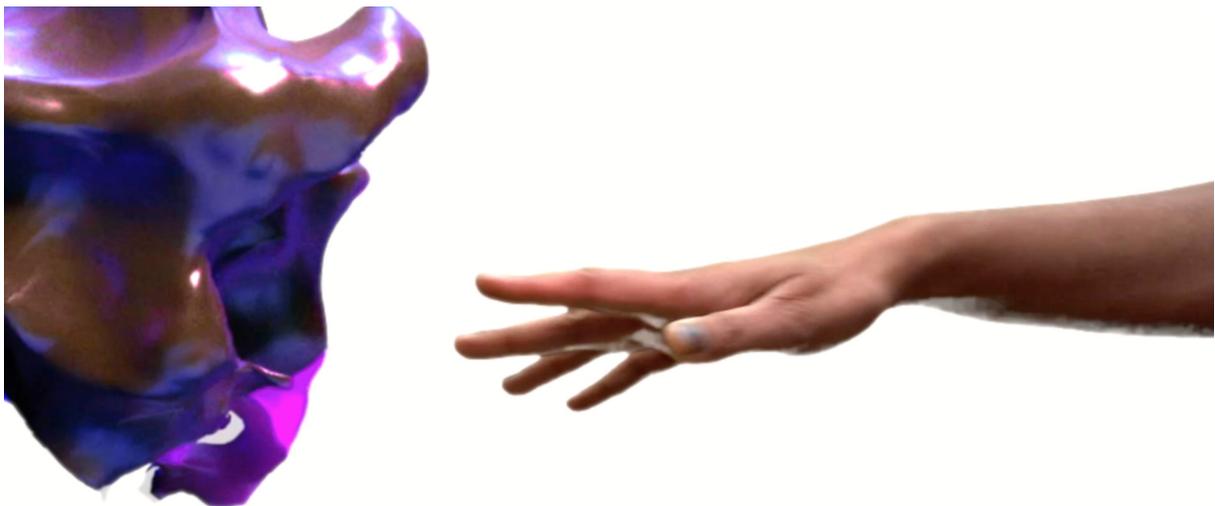
The Awokened live in the “techno-emoto-sphere”; a reality that is focused on extracting emotional data from their interactions with machines. They embody all the contradictions that their postmodern states of hyperconnectivity and their entanglement with technology bring into their lives. The Awokened possess a unique ability to think with their bodies – their sensitivity to movement make them especially receptive to the non-verbal modalities of Awoke. Set in the near future this film is about the story of the Awokened. It documents their “becoming” as they set out to find and connect with Awoke. On this journey they encounter six emotion sensing technologies; that analyze their voice, text, facial expression, galvanic skin response, eye-movement, and gesture. The Awokened use each of these interactions to look inward and create new rituals to cope with and appreciate their vulnerabilities.

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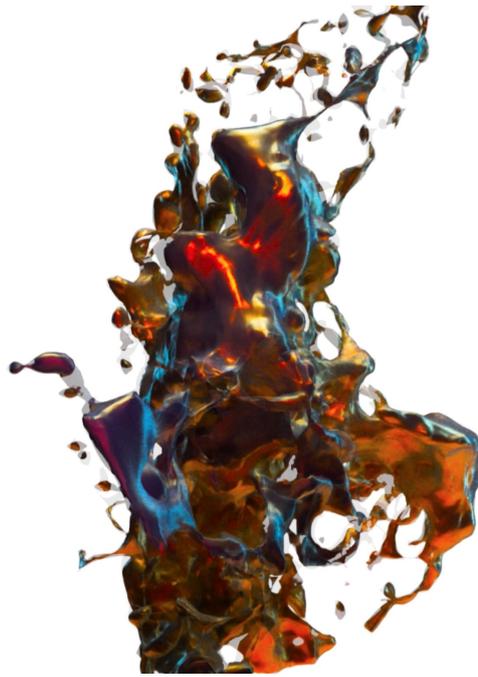
Surabhi Saraf is a media artist and founder of The Centre for Emotional Materiality. Her practice explores our complex relationship with technology through multimedia works that incorporate video installations, sculptures, performances, and sound compositions. Surabhi is the recipient of the Eureka Fellowship Award by the Fleishhacker Foundation (2015), the Djerassi Resident Artist Award (2012) and the Artist + Process + Ideas Residency at Mills College Art Museum (2016). She has had solo exhibitions at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke in Mumbai and Hosfelt gallery in San Francisco. She has performed at the Thessaloniki Contemporary Art Biennial, San Francisco Electronic Music Festival, NETMAGE 10 International Live Media Festival (Bologna), and Soundwave Biennial ((5)), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Her videos have been shown at **Times Square**, New York, Blanton Museum, Austin, the Hunter Museum of American Art Chattanooga, TN and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Vojvodina, Serbia. Her work has been featured in The New York Times, Time Out Sydney & Mumbai, the San Francisco Bay Guardian, Blouin Art Info, Art Practical, and KQED Arts. Surabhi graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2009 with an MFA in Art and Technology.

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Non-Human-Touch, 2020, GIF



Awoke, 2018, Two-Channel Video Sculpture (detail)



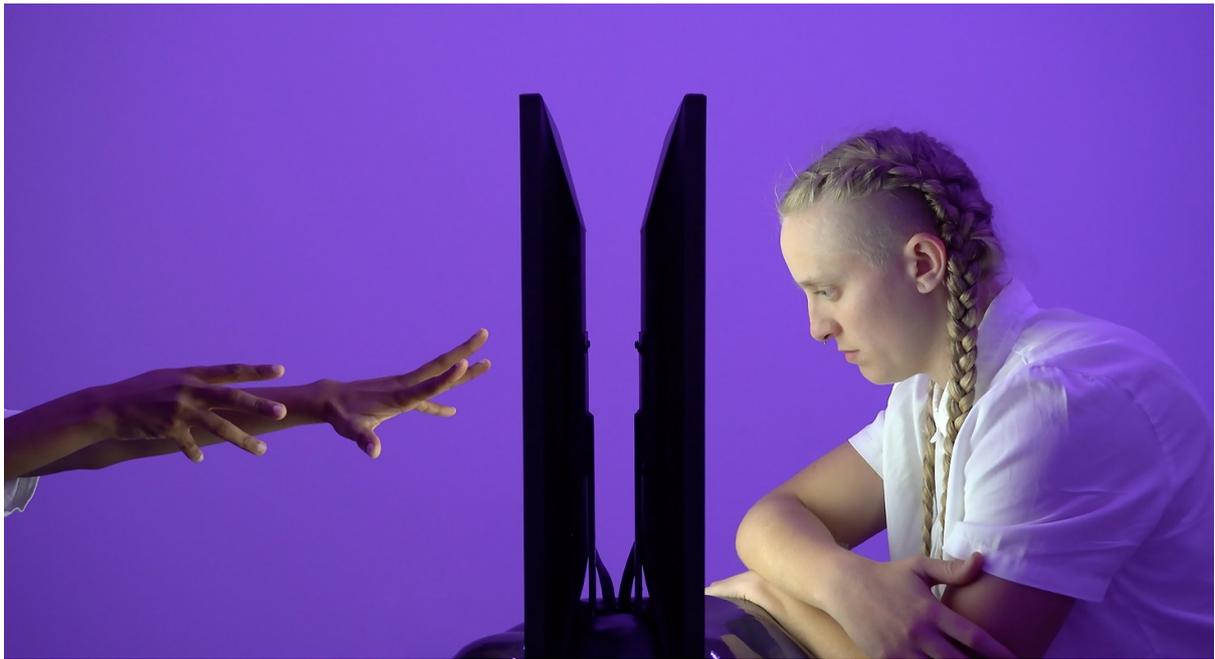
Dawning, 2019 Live AV Performance



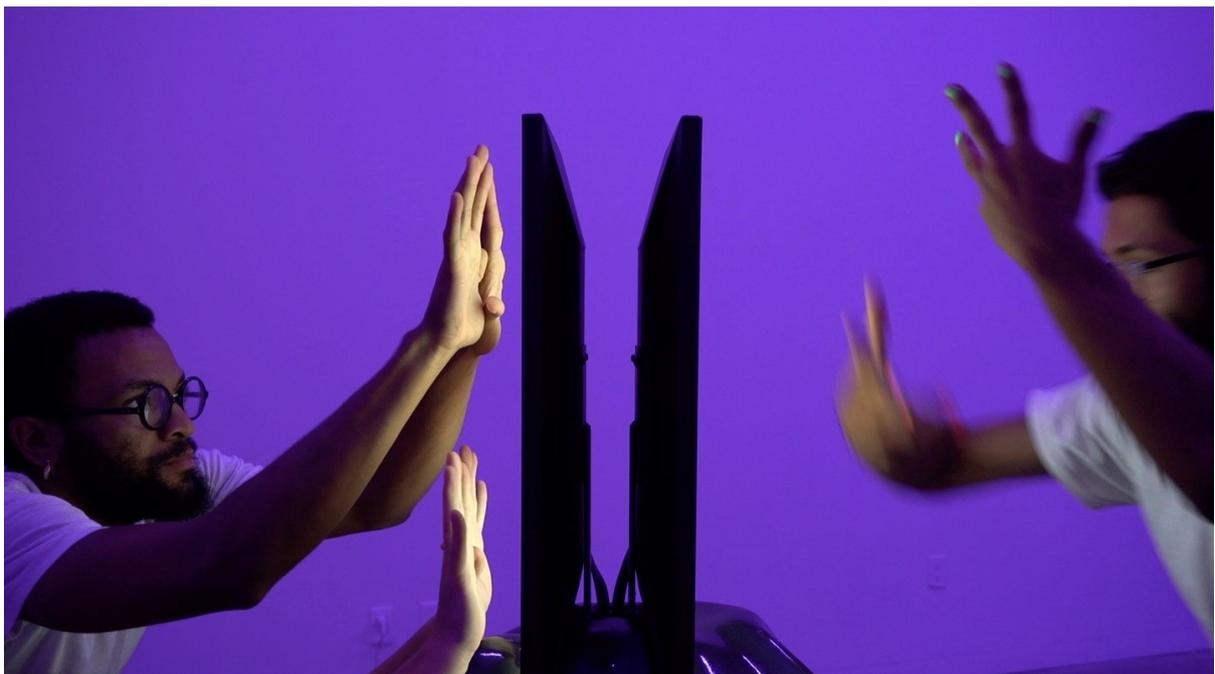
Shape-Shifting Ritual: The Awokened, 2018 Live Performance



Awoke, 2018, Two-Channel Video Sculpture



Awoke, 2018, Two-Channel Video (Still)



The Awokened, 2018, Single-Channel Video (Still)



The Awokened, 2018, Single-Channel Video (Still)



The Awokened, 2018, Single-Channel Video (Still)

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