

Title

Awakens

Introduction

This project explores how **emotional transformation** can be communicated through animation **beyond traditional character acting**. Character animation has historically relied on facial expression and body performance to convey emotion. While these methods remain essential, contemporary animation, game cinematics, and music-driven visual sequences increasingly use **environment, lighting, rhythm, and visual symbolism** as active participants in emotional storytelling.

The project investigates whether emotion can be perceived through changes in **visual and spatial systems** when character performance is deliberately restrained. Rather than treating emotion solely as an internal psychological state expressed through acting, the project explores how emotional change can be externalised and experienced through movement, space, and atmosphere.

Research Question

How can emotional transformation be communicated through environmental and visual systems when traditional character acting is intentionally minimised?

Concept

The project follows a young girl who lives within a highly restrictive social and familial environment. She is fearful of the unknown world beyond the boundaries of her community. As the animation progresses, she experiences a gradual emotional transformation, **moving from suppression and fear towards curiosity, determination, and the decision to begin a journey into the unknown**.

The narrative will remain intentionally minimal. Rather than focusing on plot events, the animation will concentrate on emotional progression and the changing relationship between the character and her environment.

Experimental Focus

The central experiment of this project is the deliberate reduction of traditional character acting. Instead of relying heavily on exaggerated facial expressions or complex body performance, the project will investigate whether emotional transformation can be communicated through environmental and visual changes.

The project will specifically explore:

- How lighting can communicate emotional shifts.
- How spatial conditions can create feelings of restriction, fear, or freedom, courage.
- How motion behaviour, timing, rhythm, and movement patterns can function as emotional language.
- How symbolic visual elements can externalise psychological experiences.
- How audiences perceive emotional transformation when emotional information is distributed across multiple visual systems rather than concentrated in character acting.

Narrative Structure

1. Suppression

The protagonist exists within a controlled and restrictive environment. Space feels enclosed, movement is limited, and visual rhythm remains static.

2. Fear

Awareness of the outside world begins to emerge. Visual instability appears through lighting, movement, and spatial distortion.

3. Conflict

Internal desire and external restriction collide. Contrasting environmental systems interact, such as cold and warmth, rigidity and fluidity, containment and expansion.

4. Transformation

The protagonist embraces uncertainty and takes her first step towards exploration. Space opens, movement becomes fluid, and traces of the dragon emerge through environmental behaviour.

Reflection

This project seeks to challenge the assumption that emotional storytelling in animation must primarily rely on character acting. By distributing emotional meaning across space, light, movement, and symbolism, the project aims to explore animation as an experiential system rather than solely a representational medium.

Ultimately, the project asks whether audiences can feel emotional transformation not only through what a character does, but through how the world around them changes.