

### Singling Out the Singularity

Japan's complicated relationship with advancing technology following the end of WWII often manifested within its media. A notable example of this is in Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 film, *Akira*, which concludes with a long sequence of Tetsuo Shima, who has accepted an overload of power, transforming into a giant, deformed baby. This scene criticises the relationship between humans and nuclear destruction and the tendency to distance oneself from the violence when every step from its conception to execution to the stigmatised recuperation was done by people.

Tetsuo's role in the lead up to this scene asserts that nuclear war should not be considered with opposing sides but as a conflict within the overall human race. Though Tetsuo initially gained his powers through abduction and experimentation, once he recognised his own abilities, he began to nurture them himself. Considering how his transformation results from an aggressive abuse of these powers, which are repeatedly connected to an unbridled amount of energy, Tetsuo's final form becomes an image of nuclear fallout. In an actual nuclear war, it's easy for one side to attack another and detach themselves from the victims due to being strangers on opposing sides of a war, and often, the world. However, with Tetsuo, he has been both the villain and victim in the film, paralleling the idea that wars are not fought between people; they are fought amongst people. It is illogical to put such a degree of separation between the attackers vs the attacked and to only focus on one side winning over the other when the big picture is that humanity is hurting itself with war, and especially advancing war technologies such as nuclear destruction.

Furthermore, focusing on Tetsuo's final form being a baby rather than an indeterminate monster, the scene serves as a warning against dissociating people from the consequences of a nuclear attack. The culmination of all the brutal acts Tetsuo has committed up to this point due to his hunger for power being a baby points the source of "evil" to a human potential present within everyone rather than an outside force that can be separated from people. This representation shows that the influences upon children dictate how they turn out and that by refusing to set examples by assigning and taking blame for acts of violence, this evil does not register as such, and people grow to think such acts are right. Babies also being the start of life and this baby being the end of a protesting Tetsuo's depicts how there are those who thrive off others' suffering. Following this evolution of man, without accepting responsibility and adequate responses to prevent repeat events, we as humans will become emotionally monstrous in coming generations.

Moreover, the fear most of the characters present felt at Tetsuo's transformation criticises the disgust felt at nuclear war victims and the stigma put on the symptoms they suffered within Japan. Tetsuo notably regained his sense, and therefore, his humanity, as his transformation took place, and he began to cry out for help since he could no longer control the powers consuming him. However, this stark display of his humanity goes mostly ignored, and even feared, as characters run away instead of helping. This reflects the help that nuclear bomb survivors sought out but did not adequately receive due to the stigma that they were dangerous or would infect healthy individuals, painting both the real events after the bomb and the response to Tetsuo's

downfall as inhumane acts. The transformation of Tetsuo into a baby in particular also contributes to this message because it forces the image of a baby being affected by radiation into the minds of the audience, highlighting the fact that the victims denied help included babies and children with so much potential life still ahead of them. Notably during this ordeal, Kaneda tried to help Tetsuo, and as the “hero” of the film, this exemplifies the type of behaviour that should have occurred in the face of such an attack.

By painting Tetsuo as a representation of humanity in the face of powerful destructive technology, *Akira* challenges the inaccurate assumption that a degree of separation can be drawn between the two. This message carries relevance to modern day and into the future because as technology advances, so does weaponry. And despite agreements to not resort to nuclear warfare, the possibility remains, and there are countries who refuse to sign. And even without nuclear force, other (usually military) acts of extreme violence happen without enough consideration for the consequences that will be faced by humanity as a joined group rather than as a fragmented collection of nations.