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Intro to Film

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Akira (1988): Cinematic Stillness and the Power of Ma

At roughly the timestamp (47:53) in the 1988 movie *Akira*, directed by Katsuhiro Ôtomo, began a very compelling scene as I watched the film. It was one that was both striking to me in the framing and composition behind it, that being when the main character, Tetsuo Shima, first meets the other experiments through a hallucination-like state when he first unlocks his powers through Akira.

Tetsuo first is shown in his hospital bed at an overhead shot, perfectly in the middle, utilizing the rule of thirds and pinning the viewers focus on the middle chunk. He is showing clear signs of distress and then, without noticing, telekinetically pulls a glass of water in his hand to drink it quickly. Along with the glass of water, he finds a stuffed bear in his bed, throwing it to the floor. With the camera panning over to focus on those two things, it subtly foreshadows the importance of those two objects for the main sequence of events about to take place in the next few cuts, as well as making the viewer infer that he is in a child-like setting with the other toys shown in the area.

As the scene resumes after a few cuts, starting back at around (49:15), Tetsuo starts to hallucinate the same stuffed bear from earlier in the scene, as well as a bunny and car toy, come to life and help one another climb onto the sheets of the bed. The negative space used in this

sequence helps build up the suspense by tricking Tetsuo, and the viewer, into a false sense of security and wonder by having the tiny movements seem inconsequential and just plain curious. It also plays more into the childlike atmosphere he is being presented in, despite being in a government hospital, which begins to make sense to the viewer the more it goes on. After he attempts to grab them in his hand, only for them to disappear, they start to take on a more sinister form in Tetsuo's mind; the toys from the floor start to build into larger and detailed versions of the bear, bunny, and car toys, which call back to the pile of toys shown earlier.

The further the scene goes on, it emphasizes the decline of Tetsuo's mental state at this time, as in his mind, these once innocent little toys were now trying to kill him and break all the room around him. The long takes throughout the sequence are only used to further the uneasy and even horrifying events to help the viewer feel the distress Tetsuo is feeling in that moment. After many attempts to get away, more and more child imagery starts to show, such as milk leaking from the monstrous toys filling the room and building blocks falling around him. This is an important part of the composition to the scene, as it is used as building blocks in itself to help the viewer piece together that Tetsuo isn't facing intentionally dangerous characters.

This is proved further when he steps back as he is being cornered and trips, stepping on and breaking the glass of water he had before, injuring his foot. The toys began screaming at the sight of blood; high pitched, childish screams. Afterwards, it finally frames the large toys slowly fading into the child experiments they truly are, pleading "stop it" before disappearing at around (51:40). How the whole scene frames everything, even if it was always alluding that these experiments were children, it still was implied from Tetsuo's perspective that they were still causing harm to him and destruction in the room. However, just from the final few seconds from then to fading around the empty destroyed hospital room, it is now shown that it was him in

reality that caused that destruction, something foreshadowed as he used a little of that power to grab the glass of water earlier at the start.

I found this whole scene interesting from an artistic, as well as a compositing level, that fully immersed me in the horror and psychological thrill of it all. I feel it proves that the importance of composition and the power of “Ma” within cinema is very potent with this movie, as well as movies in general.

Works Cited

Ôtomo, Katsuhiro, director. *Akira*. Toho, 1988.