Home Page Text: The 1988 theatrical release of the popular anime Akira was groundbreaking for Western audiences as an introduction to Katsuhiro Otomo's manga adaptation originally published in Japan's Young Magazine. While approximately half of the original story was cut out for time purposes, the movie stunned audiences with what is considered the pinnacle of cell animation. The explosive impact of its highly detailed animation and its intensely violent saga of power and corruption has been studied by fans, students, and cinema professionals for decades.

This site analyzes the theme of control. Many characters possess, desire, gain, abuse, and lose it throughout the film. The setting is the dystopic Neo-Tokyo 30 years after World War III was started by the climactic, and atomically explosive metamorphosis of the child Akira: a Frankenstein experiment gone horribly wrong. What emerges from the rubble are riotous citizens fed up with an Orwellian government still reveling in their "achievement" of surviving another world war, densely packed streets and high-tech skyscrapers, and degenerate youth who sometimes resort to drugs and motorcycles to escape the harsh reality of growing up.

The government continues its experiments on young children who inherit psychic powers only controlled by constant monitoring, isolation, and medication. They come to be known as the Espers, as they remain child-like, but physically age to the point of looking elderly. After one of these children collides with a biker, Tetsuo, and his fellow gang members, "The Capsules" ("good for health bad for education" is their motto), the government takes him in and notices that his mind is psychically active (like everyone's). The decision is made to take on a new experiment with Tetsuo, which is dangerous considering his age and, unbeknownst to the scientists, his life-long inferiority complex.

What results is Otomo's vision of how certain individuals react to obtaining super power, which begs the introspective question to every viewer, "If you had super powers like these, would you be able to suppress the emotions of revenge?"

About Akira: Characters:

Akira is a young boy recruited by the military for a secret parapsychlogy project, which led to him developing psychic abilities. During his time in the program, he met and befriended other children involved in the project (they are known in the movie as the Espers). Eventually, his powers grew beyond his control, causing an explosion that completely wiped out Tokyo. His body was later retrieved and dissected, and the remains were put into cannisters.

Kaneda is the leader of the Capsule Motorcycle Gang, and is the central protagonist of the movie. In his early childhood, he had lived in the same orphanage as his friend Tetsuo. During a chase with a rival gang at the start of the movie, he is arrested by Shikishima's men for questioning where he later meets Kei. After learning of Tetsuo's rampage and the death of his friend Yamagata, Kaneda makes it his mission to kill Tetsuo himself, booth because he feels responsible for what happened to him, and as revenge for the death of his friend Yamagata.

Tetsuo is the main antagonist of the movie, and is also a member of the Capsule Motorcycle Gang. After he is arrested during a chase with a rival gang, he is taken in by the government for testing, which leads him to gaining psychic abilities. After gaining them, he began to go on a murderous rampage, and had a couple run-ins with his best friend Kaneda, who consistently attempts to kill him. By the end, he loses control of his powers, causing his body to rapidly grow and mutate.

Onishi is the lead researcher behind the secret psychic powers program. He also serves as the Colonel's scientific advisor.After Tetsuo gains his powers, he is advised to be terminated if his powers start to become too great to be contained. He decides not to, believing that Tetsuo would be the key to solving the mystery of Akira's powers, but is killed by being crushed in his vehicle when Akira re-awakens.

Kei is a young woman whom Kaneda meets while searching for his friend Tetsuo. She is a member of a resistance force trying to take down the government forces. During her journey with Kaneda, she receives help from Lady Miyako, who reveals to her that she is a conduit for the Espers' telepathy. Near the end of the movie, it is implied that she has started developing psychic abilities of her own.

Takashi, designated number 26, is a member of the Espers, a group of psychic children cared for by the Japanese government. He is one of three other children designated as Espers, and one of four that managed to survive the gonvernment's horrible tests. Though he has the body of a child, he suffers from premature aging, causing to look like he's in his forties or fifties. He is also seen wearing a noticable red and yellow jacket.

Masaru, designated number 27, is a member of the Espers, and is essentially the defacto leader of the group, when it's actually Kiyoko. He is seen throughout the movie wearing a small green suit. During flashbacks, it's revealed that he was the one who had found Akira hooked up to various machines on an examination table.

Kiyoko, designated number 25, is the only female member of the Espers, and is the leader of the group. She can be found with her hair in pigtails, and wearing a pink nightgown. She also carries around a doll with her to sleep with. She has a very kind and gentle personality, and is also very wise and perceptive, but also tends to speak in a very cryptic manner.

Kaori is the love interest of Tetsuo. Despite being treated poorly in front of his friends, she always stood by him, especially during the point of his life when he got his psychic abilities. When his body began to grow, and mutate, however, she ended up being crushed to death by his oversized skin.

Yamagata is a member of the Capsule Motorcycle Gang, and is also seen as Kaneda's right hand man. After Tetsuo gains his powers, he goes to confront him about his rampages. Due to this, he is later killed by Tetsuo at the Harukiya bar.

Lady Miyako is a former test subject known as designated number 19. She is also the high priestess and leader of a temple in Neo-Tokyo, and also aids in helping Kaneda and Kei during their attempts to stop Tetsuo. During their adventure, Miyako helps Kei realize her importance to the Espers.

Kaisuke is the youngest member of the Capsule Motorcycle Gang after Tetsuo. He acts as the mechanic of the group, and can be found wearing a green jacket, green shirt, and red tie. He is one of the few members who cares deeply about the group as a whole, and is one of the last surviving members of the gang after the explosion in Neo-Tokyo.

Mr. Nezu is a member of the resistance movement against the government. He acts as a mole to the resistance, providing them crucial information to gaining access to a government hospital. During a military coup, Nezu burns many documents possibly containing important government notes before attempting to escape before suffering a heart attack and dying in an alleyway.

Shikishima is the head of a secret government program that conducts research on psychic test subjects. Although he appears to be an antagonist in the movie, he is actually a very honorable and dedicated soldier who is committed to protecting Neo-Tokyo from any onslaught similar to when Akira's manifested and destroyed the city 30 years ago. He is often referred to as Skinhead, due to his very unique haircut. When the Supreme Council's corrupt politicians turn on him, he launches a coup in order to protect the city from any harm that Akira and Tetsuo might cause.

Joker is the leader of the Clown Motorcycle Gang, a rival gang to the Capsules. He is seen at the very start of the movie during a chase between the two groups. Whe the police come to break up the fight, he flees from the scene, and is never seen again.