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An analysis of power structures in

Ôe Kenzaburô's *Pinch runner dossier*

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1. Introduction

If you ask a random Japanese person under the age of 30 if he or she knows Ôe Kenzaburô, you will, in my experience, be likely to get the reply: "Isn't he the father of Hikari, that disabled person who composes music?" Perhaps the person will also know that Ôe won the Nobel Literature Prize in 1994, as Japan's second laureate. Obviously, if you should happen to ask someone closer to Ôe's own generation, you would be more likely to come across someone who has actually read, if not particularly enjoyed, his work. Anything in the way of an opinion on his writing may sound like: "I prefer his earlier works, when he didn't write so damn complicated." And perhaps, as a way of conclusion: "But I love the music of his son."

It seems that to some extent, Ôe Kenzaburô has been outshone among the general public in Japan by his son Hikari—who in spite of his heavy disability, has had success as a composer of classical music. However, when Hikari first became known, it was as a character in his father's fictional works. In the period between 1964 and 1976, Ôe Kenzaburô wrote a number of stories in which the pair of the father and the disabled son figures—in differing contexts, with different significance attached to the character of the disabled child. A constant trait, however, is the attempt to move marginalised individuals from their overlooked position in the peripheries, and into the centre of attention. In the words of the protagonist of *The Pinch runner dossier,* himself a father of a disabled child: "I'm not saying ... that *our children* should rule over *the children who are different from our children*. Only that we put them at the centre!" (Ôe, 1982b, p.47) In the novel, this vision become reality in a very concrete way—the father and son change ages, so that the child becomes the older and the father the younger. Considering the case of the real-world Ôe Kenzaburô and Hikari, it would seem that *Pinch runner dossier* was written in a prescient moment.

On the writer

Ôe has defined his ambition as a writer in the following way: "As one with a peripheral, marginal, off-center existence in the world, I would like to continue to seek—with what I hope is a modest, decent, humanistic contribution of my own—ways to be of some use in the cure

and reconciliation of mankind" (Ôe, 1995, p.128). As this quote suggests, he has constantly been concerned what lies outside the centre. Ôe was born in the periphery of Japan, in a small village called Ôse in Ehime prefecture.[1] This was in 1935, during the age of Japan's expansion into Manchuria. When the war ended in 1945, Ôe was in his fifth year in primary school. His childhood was a time of great changes in Japan; as a boy, he experienced both the totalitarian, imperialist regime of the war, the change to idealistic, postwar "democracy", as well as the shift to conservativism during the Cold war. His literary activity started in the year after the outbreak of the Korean War, when he edited and wrote poems and critical essays for the literary jounal of Matsuyama Higashi High School. At the age of 19, he passed the entrance exam of Tokyo University, Department of Literature, where he majored in French Literature. In university, he wrote several short stories and plays, and in 1957, he won the May Festival Prize for the short story "An odd job"[2]. Soon he started to publish his stories in literary journals, and in 1958, he won the prestigious Akutagawa prize for "Prize stock" (Ôe and Subaru, 2001, p.180). His first long story, *Nip the buds, shoot the kids[3]*, was completed this same year, and in the years between 1958 and 1963 he wrote a number of novels and short stories.

1963 marks a turning point in Ôe's life and writing. Two events took place this year that would cause a distinct change in the thematic and political concerns of both his fictional writing and his essays. The first event was the birth of his oldest son, Hikari. He was born with a serious cranal defect; the diagnosis was encephalocele, or brain hernia (Cameron, 1998, p.6). The doctors informed Ôe and his wife that unless the baby underwent surgery, it would die. However, even if they could save the life of the child, there was a great risk that it would become a "human vegetable", incapable of even the most basic functioning (Cameron, 1998, p.6). This dilemma is reflected in two of Ôe's texts, "Aghwee the sky monster"[4] and *A personal matter[5]*, both from 1964. Unlike the main character in these stories, Ôe did not hesitate to go through with Hikari's operation[6] (Cameron, 1998, p.14). Hikari grew up, and in spite of problems like developmental delay, mental retardation, seizures, and visual problems, he showed a keen sensibility for sounds and music (Cameron, 1998, p.15, 33). The most obvious effect of Hikari's birth on Ôe's writing was the recurrent appearance of the disabled son as a character in his stories, as his "obsessive metaphor", as Wilson calls it (1986, p.83). As the real-

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1 The biographical data in the following paragraphs are based on Gunzô, 1995, p.260—292 unless otherwise
   stated.
2 *Kimyô na shigoto,* cfr. Ôe, 1996.
3 *Memushiri kouchi,* cfr. Ôe, 1987b.
4 *Sora no kaibutsu aguî,* cfr. Ôe, 1972.
5 *Kojinteki na taiken*, cfr. Ôe, 1981.
6 We will discuss the dilemma of the father in *A personal matter* in chapter 2.

world Hikari grew up, and the relationship between him and his father developed, so too does his shadow figure in Ôe's text grow older, and the interaction between son and father grows more complex.

The second event, which took place the same summer, was Ôe's first visit to Hiroshima. During his stay, he heard the first-hand accounts of the destruction and suffering caused by the atomic blast. He also witnessed the state of division and confusion within the anti-nuclear movement. This became another turning point in his writing. In one of the essays in *Hiroshima notes,* Ôe mentions a female victim of the Hiroshima blast who, in spite of her acute fear that any child she bore might be disabled, chose to marry and give birth. Ôe describes her courage as "a courage bordering on despair" (*zetsubôteki na hodo no yûkansa*) (Ôe, 1965, p.47). The impact of this visit can be seen in Ôe's subsequent writing, where he begins to explore the theme of surviving in the midst of the madness of the nuclear age, where the annihilation of mankind could come about by the accidental press of a button. Digging deep into the madness and despair of the age, Ôe sought to extract the foundations of hope. This was a project that dominated his literary activities in the 1960's and 70's, and which resulted in some of his most eccentric and interesting works. As a result, he started to show a tendency towards the unbridled, blending a wide range of themes that at first seem unrelated, but which reverberate with each other. To mention some; madness, nuclear annihilation, the moon landing, the emperor system, Japan-U.S. relations, political corruption, suicide, Japanese mythology and traditions, the Meiji restoration, minority groups (like the *buraku* and the Korean minorities), environmental destruction, the Vietnam War... And in the middle of this we find the disabled child. Silent and defenceless, it is a being that seems to mean "absolutely nothing to this world" (Ôe, 1994a, p.162[7])—and yet, Ôe insists that somehow this child holds the key to rescue mankind from its own insanity.

On the text

Pinch runner dossier (hereafter *Pinch runner*) was first published as a serial in the literary magazine "Shinchô" between August and October of 1976, and came out as a full-length novel that same October. It was written in a period when the influence of Bakhtin's ideas of

7   Quoted from John Nathan's translation.

Rabelaisian laughter was very visible in his writing, and is stylistically close to the novels *The floodwaters have come unto my soul*[8] from 1973, and *The day he himself shall wipe my tears away*[9] from 1972, and the short stories of *Teach us to outgrow our madness*[10], published in 1969. However, while Ôe's preoccupation with what he calls the "nonsensical" (*kôtômukei*) to some degree dominates all of these texts, *Pinch runner* is arguably the one in which Ôe to the greatest degree allows this "nonsensicality" to run wild.

One of the aspects that make *Pinch runner* an interesting object of study, is that it forms the conclusion of one of the long lasting projects in Ôe's fictional writing: the saga of the disabled son. This was one of the main, recurring themes of Ôe's writing in the 1960's and the early 70's. Based on his experinces as father to Hikari, Ôe explored the relationship between the father and the disabled son in a series of texts in this period. What is interesting about *Pinch runner* is that it places the disabled child within a context that is not only limited to the private sphere, but which encompasses a wide political and historical framework. By insisting on depicting the disabled child within a wide, political framework, Ôe creates a bridge between the public and the private, and finds a way to reevaluate the political structures of Japan from an original point of view. With *Pinch runner*, the disabled child had become a being with a strong, subversive potential. By examining this text, we can also shed new light on the previous texts in which this character appears.

However, *Pinch runner* can also help us shed new light on the historical background to which it refers. When we begin to examine the historical references of this story, we are lead to events that have played an important role in forming Japanese society as it is today: Japan's war defeat and the American occupation policy, the consolidation of the LDP rule and the conservative, pro-U.S. policy that has dominated the country's politics for the last five decades, the anti-Security Treaty protests of 1960 and the sharp increase of civil and student movements in the 1960's, and the breakdown of the marxist movement in the 70's. By juxtaposing and jumbling together these various contexts, along with a variety of images known to us from Ôe's previous writing, *Pinch runner* forces the reader to reexamine each of these events and images, and reconsider their relation to each other. Although this could be said of many of Ôe's fictional texts, it stands out as one of the most unrestrained and extreme exponents of this tendency.

It could therefore be said that *Pinch runner* is one of the most difficult works to access that Ôe has written. On almost every level it resists a straightforward reading: Its plot defies logical

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8 *Kôzui ga waga tamashii ni oyobi*, cfr. Ôe, 1983b.
9 *Mizukara waga tamshii o nuguitamau* hi, cfr. Ôe, 1991b.
10 *Warera no kyôki o ikinobiru michi o oshieyo,* cfr. Ôe, 1975b.

summary, the narrative order is springing, and its constant references to contemporary and historical events makes it all but unintelligible to readers without some knowledge of postwar Japanese history. Evoking images from both previous works and from history, it juxtaposes phenomena that at first seem unrelated. Yet, this could also be seen as some of its strength. For as we start examining thes references in order to "make sense" of the text, we are forced to analyse them critically. The text resists any attempt to structure these references in a clear and logical framework, and yet, unless we read it against a historical background, it is all but unintelligible. In her discussion on *The day he himself shall wipe my tears away*, Nemoto describes this aspect of Ôe's writing style in the following way:

> Readers are "distanced" from the narrations and forced to maintain a critical view of characters and events. In other words, these "distanced" narratives develop a relationship between reader and text so that the readers are induced to re-examine their political views. History is thus presented as changeable. (Nemoto, 1991, p.iii—iv)

In this sense, *Pinch runner* could be said to be a continuation of a tendency in Ôe's writing that became increasingly apparent in the late 1960's and the 1970's. At every junction, it forces the reader to "connect the dots", and ask him- or herself; how should the specific historical reference that appear here be read in relation to each other? And what is the significance of looking at these phenomena together? Since the text provides no authoritative framework in which to interpret them, we must constantly evaluate and reevaluate how each reference can make sense within the farcical, ambivalent, and fluid framework of the text. In this way, the process of reading *Pinch runner* forces us to reexamine postwar Japanese history from a new perspective, rather different from that of official history writing.

As one of his most uninhibited texts, *Pinch runner* could be seen as an experiment. In letting his imagination have free reins, unrestrainedly combining elements from his previous works, his private life, Japanese history, and contemporary politics, it seems as if Ôe has made the ultimate attempt to create a vision powerful enough to resist all power structures. Overshadowed by more structured texts, like *Games of contemporaneity, A personal matter,* "Seventeen", and his debut text "Prize stock", it may not be Ôe's most central work. While certain critics, as we will see later, find the lack of clear structure and form to be a weakness of the text, its stubborn refusal to resolve its ambivalences makes it one of Ôe's most challenging and exiting works.

Plot summary

The story of *Pinch runner* unfolds around the pair of a father and son: Mori[11], a child born with mental deficiencies caused by a cranial defect, and his father, a middle-aged, former nuclear engineer who is referred to only as "Mori-father". This pair is at first introduced to the reader through the narration of a middle-aged novelist who is father to Hikari, one of Mori's classmates in his special class. After an incident during a class excursion, where one of the children gets his hand caught in an automatic door at a supermarket, Mori-father advocates a full reform of the school system. However, the meeting deteriorates into a shouting melee, and Mori-father decides to take Mori out of school. Nine months later, Hikari-father receives a letter from Mori-father in which he reveals that he and Mori is about to embark on an adventure, and appoints to Hikari-father the task of recording their story, as his "ghost writer". This marks a switch in the narration: Until this point, Hikari-father has been the narrator—now, he becomes the silent chronicler (except for occasional comments and critical remarks) of Mori-father's narrative.

The "adventure" of Mori and Mori-father begins with a supernatural event that Mori-father calls the "conversion"[12]. In one night, Mori becomes 20 years older, changing age from 8 to 28, while Mori-father becomes correspondingly younger, changing from 38 to 18. Along with a metamorphosis of their bodies, the "conversion" also implies a reversal of the hierchical positions of father and son, of time, and of the fixed order of hereditary succession. Ascribing this supernatural event to the design of a "Cosmic will", Mori-father believes that he and Mori has been chosen for a mission, as "pinch runners for mankind" (Ôe, 1982b, p.393). Although he does not have a clear idea what exactly they are supposed to do, or who they are opposing, he sets out to find out what the nature of their mission is.

Soon, he and Mori gets caught in the struggle between two opposing revolutionary parties, which, as it turns out, are in the progress of making an atomic bomb each. As the Mori-and-father pair gets mixed up in the action, they join forces with a motley group of people in the attempt to find out what is going on: Ôno Sakuraô, who is a TV celebrity, aspiring film director, and Mori-father's love interest, "Righteous man" (*gijin*), who is leader of the Shikoku anti-nuclear movement, "Volunteer mediator" (*shigan chûsainin*), a self-appointed mediator between the warring extremist factions, and Sayoko[13], a quarrelsome member of one of the revolutionary

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11 Written with the Japanese character for "forest", but as the narrator explains, the latin word "mori" can mean both "death" and "idiocy".
12 Wilson translates this term as "switch-over". We will discuss this term in chapter 5.
13 Clearly a pun on the Japanese word "left-wing", *sayoku*.

parties, and the girlfriend of the "converted"Mori.

To get to the bottom of this atomic plot, the group begins to probe into the background and activities of the shadowy figure who is secretly funding both of the revolutionary parties; a man known variously as "Big shot A" and "Patron". As they delve deeper—or, given the erratic nature of the narrative; stumble along—they discover that the network of "Big shot A" extends further than they had imagined: Starting with Mori-father, whom he employed to collect information on bizarre events involving radioactive matter, the influence of "Patron" extends into all sectors of society. These contacts are used in his "human domination program" (*ningen shihai puroguramu*). When one or both of the revolutionary parties complete their atomic bomb, panic would break out. In this situation of terror and social instability, "Big shot A" intends to capitalise on the situation, and act as protector of the people of Tokyo, and, more importantly, the imperial family. Elevating himself to the status of saviour, he would gain control over the minds and imaginations of the entire nation, and eventually pull off a coup d'état to make himself ruler.

In the process of uncovering the plot of "Patron", the little group makes inquiries into the revolutionary party to which Ôno is affiliated. Questioning a functionary, they find that the movement is so tightly structured around the central hierarchy of its organisation that it allows the leading elite to make decisions unquestioned. In an attempt to investigate the situation among grassroot members of the movement, Mori-father and "Volunteer mediator" infiltrate the university campus where the group has its stronghold. However, they are captured and beaten up before "Volunteer mediator" manages to negotiate a truce with the activists. In the end, Mori-father is reunited with Mori—who has been in the custody of the group—and the two of them hold a speech at one of the group's meetings. With Mori-father speaking the words that Mori telepathically transmits to him, they try to convince the audience that they are being used as pawns in the scheme of "Patron". The audience, however, refuses to hear the message, and the meeting breaks down.

After this, the cosmic mission of the "converted" Mori-and-father pair enters its final stage. They learn that "Patron" has fallen ill, and that a group of locals from his village, dressed as clowns, has gathered outside the hospital. Seizing the opportunity, the Mori-and-father pair dress themselves up, and mingles with the clowns, who are beginning their preparations for a village festival, a *matsuri*, in the middle of Tokyo, to send off the spirit of the dying "Patron". Before the festivities begin, however, Mori and Mori-father are summoned to the bedside of "Patron". Offering them an astronomical sum of money, he asks them to fulfill his "human

domination program" in time before he dies. Out of sheer spite, Mori-father agrees to the offer. However, at the decisive moment, the silent Mori springs to action. In his final dash as "Pinch runner for mankind", he clubs "Big shot A" to death, grabs the money, and dives into the blazing bonfire of the *matsuri* outside, drawing the story to a sudden close.

Contemporary Criticism

"Even among the numerous works by Kenzaburô Ôe, *Pinch runner dossier* is extremely difficult to read" (Tsuge, 1977, p.250). These are the words with which the critic Tsuge Teruhiko opens his review on *Pinch Runner.* As should be clear from my above summary of the text, it is chaotic and unpredictable, arguably the most unbridled of all of Ôe's fictional texts. He has let his imagination run unrestrained, stringing together seemingly unrelated events and characters, and juxtaposing grave political and ethical issues with uninhibited slapstick humor. The result is a novel in which the extremities of politics coexist with those of the body; urine and uranium in an uneasy harmony. It is a text which in almost every conceivable way defies a straightforward reading: semantically, syntactically, thematically, politically. And while the antagonist of the novel, "Patron", is killed on the last page of the novel, it is hard to say that anything is resolved by the end of the text. The villain is dead, but by then he is already exposed as a buffoon masquerading as "anti-Christ", a parody of an antagonist. Everything and everyone has been degraded, in the Bakhtinian sense, in farcical travesty, and everyone, from the mighty and imposing to the disabled children, becomes objects of laughter[14].

However, while the farcical, disruptive elements of the text are particularly conspicuous, they are constantly juxtaposed with a sense of gravity and urgency. The conflict between the comic and the serious is never resolved—and it is precisely in the tension arising between them that the dynamic force of this text is created. The above quoted Tsuge acknowledges the effort behind the text as "the author's attempt to overcome both his personal problems and the problems of society through joining them together," although, he ultimately dismisses the text—somewhat ambivalently—as a "truly heroic failure" (*masa ni sôretsu na shippai*) (Tsuge, 1977, p.255).

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14 For a detailed discussion on the influence of Bakhtin's theories of "grotesque realism" and Rabelaisian carnivalism on Ôe's writing, cfr. Wilson, 1986, p. 83—104.

This ambivalent reaction is, I believe, representative for many readers of this text. While opinions were divided on whether *Pinch runner* was a successful work of fiction or not, most critics seem to agree that with this story, Ôe had attempted a truly ambitious project. Shimizu Tôru, another contemporary critic who shares Tsuge's scepticism, gives us a more detailed, if somewhat cryptical, account of what he sees as the problem of *Pinch runner*:

> The failure of this ambitious work, which seems to be conceptualised by the author as an adventure born out of necessity, urges us to reconfirm a literary maxim; that the writer must always examine the kind of romanesque imagination seen here with a sense of down-to-earth restraint. This is a maxim that Ôe follows in nearly all of his previous works. (Shimizu, 1976, p.347).

In this text, Shimizu saw an "ambitious" project which, due to the lack of restraint on the part of the author, resulted in a "failure". However, he is somehow unable to dismiss the work altogether, adding that "the failure of this daring adventure strikes us [*kokoro o utsu*] with far more force than a steady repetition of successes. I await Ôe's next work, hoping he will excersise more restraint" (Shimizu, 1976, p.347). It would seem that Shimizu's last anticipation is a contradiction in terms. For a writer of the status Ôe had acquired by the mid-1970's, a "return to restraint" would mean departing from the soul-striking "daring adventure" of *Pinch runner,* back to the "steady repetition of successes". It is therefore interesting to note that Shimizu's prediction turned out to be correct: Ôe's next novel, *Games of Contemporaneity* from 1979, *was* in many ways a return to restraint. While it has many thematical and methodological traits in common with *Pinch runner*—such as the foregrounding of the community of marginals, the deconstruction of the emperor-centered national mythology of Japan, the influence of Rabelaisian carnivalism and grotesque realism, the destabilising of hierarchies, and the ambivalent duality of the narrating character(s)—it is in all ways a more tightly structured novel. Its thematics appear more clearly, its narrative structure is more ordered and the characters—although eccentric—have more clearly defined roles within the narrative.

Still, as Shimizu's ambivalent statement above suggests, *Pinch runner* has different qualities, which make it a no less interesting choice for a study. With its constant disruptions of the expectations of the reader, its carries a signifying force which cannot be replicated in a more "restrained" novel. Another contemporary critic, Kaga Otohiko, describes *Pinch runner* as an anti-novel. Pointing out the vast and highly eclectic array of personal, historical, political and culutral references in the text, he believes Ôe's intention is to "smash the prim and well-ordered world of the conventional novel." (Kaga, 1976, p.63) In a society where restraint, harmony and clarity were held as self-evident standards, *Pinch runner* is uninhibited,

discordant, and chaotic. If official language, and the standards of "good literature" are complicit in perpetuating the structural hierarchies of society, it should come as no surprise that a text which questions these structures, defies the common sense of both language and literary form.

Approaching *Pinch runner*

In this sense, we can say that the uninhibited narrative style of *Pinch runner* represents an act of resistance. Throughout his career, one of Ôe's preoccupations has been with marginal individuals, exploring the forces which create and sustain hierarchies between the central and the peripheral. As these structures are created and upheld through discourse, language is complicit in the process of marginalisation. Ôe's awareness of this can clearly be seen in his experiments with non-intuitive syntactical structures, for instance in such novels as *Football in the first year of man'en*[15], *The day he himself shall wipe my tears away* and *Teach us how to outgrow our madness*. In *Pinch runner,* the device of the "ghost writer" adds a seemingly unnecessary step in the communication process between "narrator" and "reader". By filtering Mori-father's narrative through the character of Hikari-father, the narrative voice is made diffuse; it becomes unclear *whose* words we are reading, and we are constantly forced to ask ourself whether they belong to Mori-father or Hikari-father. There is no single source of the narrative, its origins is plural, blurred, and unclear. As Gibson points out, the pluralisation of the narrative voice represents a relativisation of "the fixity, unity or homogeneity of the narrative voice and reduces the illusion of the latter's singular power." (Gibson, 1996, p.151). By pluralising the narrative voice, Ôe resists a model of the novel as a one-way communication, and breaks down the conventional hierarchy between the narrator (as the active "speaker") and the reader (as the passive "listener"). The reader is forced to participate actively in the process of creating meaning, in a dialogue with the text. A detailed examination of the narrative aspects of *Pinch runner* is outside the scope of this study[16], but it should be clear that its form and

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15 *Man'en gannen no futtobôru.* Komori Yôichi (2002, p.118—123) analyses the syntactical structure of the opening sentence of this story, and points out how Ôe's ambivalent use of particles (*kakujoshi*) constantly force the reader to reconsider how each section of the sentence connects with the rest of the sentence. While reading a single period (which in Ôe's case can be quite long), the reader must therefore simultaneously consider a number of different interpretations, which gradually and constantly changes. Komori describes the effect as "watching a motion image in extreme slow motion" (Komori, 2002, p.122). A similar effect can be witnessed in the opening paragraph of *Pinch runner.*
16 Michiko Wilson discusses the dynamics of Ôe's Bakhtinian influence in *Pinch runner.* However, while she

narrative structure, as well as its contents, shows the underlying concern with power and power structures.

Although characterising a plot as confusing as that of *Pinch runner* is difficult, it could be described as something in between an adventure story and a parody of an adventure story. It is the story of a disabled child and his father, who embark on a mission to save mankind from enslavement. However, already before we open *Pinch Runner*, the title reminds us that what we are about to read, concerns itself with power relations. The term "pinch runner" is linked to the thematics and project of the text on several levels. In the context of baseball, the pinch runner is a substitute player. His existence implies a higher hierarchical order between the regular players on one hand, and the substitutes on the other. Most of the time, he is an excess member of the team, secondary to the regular players—consigned to the periphery of the field (ie. the bench), because he lacks the overall skills necessary to become part of the starting lineup of the team. In the context of the novel, the pinch runner represents the off-center, the irregular, the provisional, the supplemental, the substitutive. His existence speaks of unequal power relations between "regular" and "irregular", and a structure where such inequality is institutionalised as part of the game. It is evident that *Pinch runner* is a text that concerns itself with power structures, and particularly with those who find themselves at thebottom of these structures.

At the same time, the image of the pinch runner represents the possibility to overturn these seemingly rigid and unchangeable structures. While lacking the overall abilities of the regular players, his ability to run can make him the decisive factor to change the outcome of the match. As the term indicates, the pinch runner is employed at a moment of crisis—at the "pinch" of the game. When his team is about to be defeated, and all other hope is lost, he gets his chance to make his contribution. *Pinch runner* is a text that not only concerns itself with examining and criticising hierarchical structures, it also explores the possibility to overturn, subvert and relativise these structures.

In order to examine this, however, we need to answer the following questions: *What* are these "structures" that the text concerns itself with? *Who* discriminates, and *who* is being discriminated? To answer these questions, we obviously have to engage in a close reading of the text. In Ôe's case, however, reading the text closely also implies looking *beyond* the text. As we have mentioned, one of the characteristics of this text, is its uninhibited referentiality. *Pinch*

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examines the use of narrative repetition in *My tears* and *Father, where are you going?* as a device of dialogic narrative, she does not discuss the narrative structure of *Pinch runner* in relation to Bakhtinian dialogics.

runner not only represents or refers to specific historical and political events, but forms a direct response to them, and enters into dialouge with them. Characters and events are written in a way that forces the reader to superimpose them on his image of the historical referents that they evoke. At the same time, it distorts these references and forces them into new constellations with each other. We therefore need to discuss the significance both of the context to which the text refers, and of how *Pinch runner* is written to form a response to these events.

In this sense, our study departs from the approach of such critics as Michiko Wilson (1986). In her study, she focuses on the impact of Bakhtin on Ôe's writing, in particular his theories of "grotesque realism", Rabelaisian carnivalism and the dynamics of debasement. Clearly, these are issues that are important to discuss to gain better understanding of the theoretical framework of the text. However, her study does not touch upon the historical background of the novel. While it gives insight into *how* Ôe criticises authoritarian hierarchies, it does not answer the question of *what* hierarchies these are, and *why* this eccentric novel was written in the way it is, at that particular time in history. These are questions that we will examine in this study. To do this, we will look at how the text enters into a two-way dialogue with history. On one hand, historical context will be examined to shed light on the characters and events of the text. On the other, we will see how the text *Pinch runner* can be read as a product of, or reaction to, the historical developments that it refers to.

To help us navigate our way through this complex and confusing text, we will use terminology from structuralist and post-structuralist discourse as a point of departure. This means that our study will start as a discussion of how the text represents power relations as "structures". By this we mean networks of relationships where the different actors are related hierarchically to each other, according to their level of power and influence. Those who have much power are located close to the "centre" of the structure, while the less influential are consigned to the "periphery" or "margins". Holding this structure together is the unspoken concensus of certain, axiomatic core values that are beyond questioning. According to Derrida, the function of the "centre" is to act as a "fixed origin", that can "orient, balance, and oganize the structure" (1978, p.278). The "centre" has the power to declare irrelevant or void any discourse that runs counter to its interests. The interests of the "periphery" become, by definition, "peripheral" and insignificant, whereas those of the "centre" are unquestionably accepted as "central" and important. While the relationship between "centre" and "periphery" is one of inequality and domination, the discrimination will always seem a necessary, or even natural, part of the system.

When we set out to analyse power structures in *Pinch runner,* it is with two purposes: Firstly, we will look at how power structures are represented in the text, along with the problems related to them—discrimination and oppression. We will largely address this in chapters 2 and 3. Secondly, we will examine what we could call the "project" of the text; to explore the possibility of breaking down and deconstructing these structures. This will be the topic for chapters 4 and 5. Obviously, it is impossible to separate these two approaches completely. In the act of representing "centre" and "periphery", the text already starts to deconstruct them. But for the sake of clarity, we can think of the first half of this study as an investigation of the "problem" presented in *Pinch runner*, while the second half looks into how the text approaches a "solution", although tentative and provisional.

In chapter 2, we will examine the representation of "periphery", through an analysis of the role of the disabled child in *Pinch runner*. In this character, which has appeared frequently in Ôe's texts, Ôe has created an image of an absolutely vulnerable and defenceless creature, which is forced into an existence on the fringes of society. At the same time, as my analysis of *A personal matter* in chapter 2 shows*,* the disabled are deviants, potentially subvertive creatures that threaten the hierarchical coherence of the structure. Through their abnormality, they represent a form of "monsters"—deviants that cannot be subsumed into the exisiting, unified and homogeneous model of "humanity". The disabled child is in Ôe's fiction presented as an ambivalent being that is both vulnerable and threatening, and represents both human and non-human characteristics. However, by contrasting *A personal matter* and *Pinch runner* it becomes evident that Ôe's approach to this ambivalence has developed. We will examine how the ambivalent representation of the disabled child in *Pinch runner* is used as a device that unmasks structural discrimination against the deviant, and makes it possible to reevaluate hierarchical power structures from the perspective of the "periphery".

These hierarchical power structures are what we will examine closer in chapter 3. More precisely, we will look at what—and who—it is that holds the hierarchy in place. In other word, this chapter is an examination of the forces of the "centre". *Pinch runner* seemingly has a clearly defined antagonist in the character "Big shot A". As we examine the historical and political context that *Pinch runner* refers to, it becomes evident that this character in a parodic way points to a series of interconnected structural problems in Japanese politics that came to the surface in 1976. However, behind "Big shot A" lurks the shadow of the imperial institution, as the symbolic "centre" that orients and organises the structure of Japanese society. Through a comparison with Ôe's short story "Seventeen", we will see how *Pinch runner* marks a new

phase in Ôe's criticism of the emperor system. Here, Ôe not only describes and criticises the symbolic force of the imperial institution, he inscribes it within a political and historical context. In this way, the text destabilises the foundations of the symbolical power of this "centre".

After examining the "periphery" and the "centre", we will look at how the text approaches the task of exploring the possibility of a "solution" to the problem of hierarchical power structures. A key term in *Pinch runner* is "revolution", and in chapter 4, we will look at how this phenomenon is represented in the text. Through the parodic image of the two revolutionary parties, the text engages in a dialogue with the history of the student movement of the 1960's and 70's. By examining the text in light of this context, we will see how it forms a key to understanding the "nonsensicality" and unrestrainedness of *Pinch runner* as a reaction to the developments that culminated in the decline of the Marxist movement in the 1970's.

This will form the background for the discussion in chapter 5 of the tentative "solution" that the text suggests: the paradoxical, absurd and "nonsensical" concept of a "conversion". In this chapter, we will discuss how the "conversion" of Mori and Mori-father is presented as an alternative to the concept of "revolution". It represents a form of change that is non-linear and non-binary. Through the "conversion", Ôe explores the possibility of transforming the problem of power structures, by introducing a perspective that can relativise the distinction between "centre" and "periphery". In this way, the text explores the possibility of creating a vision where such differences can no longer become the source of authority.

Throughout this study, I will refer to a number of Japanese texts. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated. This also includes the text that is the focus of our study here, *Pinch runner dossier*. A note on the translation of the title: It may confuse readers who are familiar with Michiko Wilson's translation, *The pinch runner memorandum* (Ôe, 1994c) that I choose to translate the title differently. The word that is translated as "memorandum", *chôsho*, refers to a Japanese legal practice where a representative of the legal authorities writes down a statement on behalf of the suspect, in the first person form—based on what he has said during interrogations. It is closely linked with the narrative structure of this text: When Mori-father asks Hikari-father to become his "ghost writer", he says:

> Why I need you as my ghost writer? That's because I need to have in readiness a someone who can record my actions and thoughts in a "dossier" [*chôsho*]. As I'm about to embark on a new adventure

with Mori, I get the feeling that without such a person, the adventure, myself, even Mori, would be no more than a delirious phantom image. You see, the adventure I'm anticipating is utterly fantastic, and if I should have my "dossier" taken down by the police[17], it would just become a load of fictional babble [*kakû no tawagoto*]. (Ôe, 1982b, p.54).

The *chôsho* is a document written on behalf of somebody; it is ostensibly the words of the suspect, but at the same time it is shaped by the person who writes it down[18]. Like the narration of *Pinch runner*, it is an ambivalent document; Does it contain the words of the suspect? Or is it, as critics of this legal practice claims, a "prosecutor essay"? (Johnson, 2002, p.248) This ambivalence surrounding the source of the words is a vital characteristic of the narration of *Pinch runner*, and while we will not discuss the narrative process directly, I wished to render the title with a translation that could capture the legal context of the original. Obviously, there is no English term that corresponds to *chôsho*. My choice of "dossier" is based on Johnson (2002), who uses this term in his study of the phenomenon.

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17 Wilson translates this section as "if my 'memorandum' ever ends up in the hands of the police." (Ôe, 1994c, p.32). This is based on a misunderstanding of the term "chôsho o torareru". Semantically, it could mean "have one's *chôsho* taken away". However, in common use, it refers to the practice of having one's testimony written down in the *chôsho* form.

18 For detailed discussions of the legal practice of *chôsho*, cfr. Johnson, 2002; Leo, 2002; Foote, 1996.

2. The peripheral individual: Mori and *our children*

One of the main purposes of this study is to analyse how power structures are represented in *Pinch runner*. Simplifying a little, we can say that the text is structured around one, central axis. In one end we find the representative of the "centre" of power, embodied in the character "Big shot A" (although, as we will see in chapter 3, his role is not entirely unambiguous). In the other end, we find *our children*, represented by the character Mori.

The character of the disabled child appears frequently in Ôe's texts in the 1960's and 1970's. It represents the weakest of the weak in society, incapable of defending itself from discrimination and oppression. However, ever since its first appearance in Ôe's writing, the disabled child has been an ambivalent figure. On one hand, it is a creature that is born to a life of dependency, at the mercy of its surroundings. At the same time it represents a disruptive force. While it is a character incapable of violence, its abnormality gives it a "monstrous" aspect that challenges some of the fundamental values that established society takes for granted; normality, humanity, reason.

While this sense of ambivalence always has been a part of Ôe's representation of the disabled child, there has been a change in his approach to it. This becomes clear when we compare *Pinch runner* with one of the first stories in which this character appears, *A Personal Matter*. One critic has described the relationship between the two texts. In *A Personal Matter,* Ôe chose to resolve this ambivalence. In *Pinch runner,* however, he uses the disruptive qualities of the child as a mechanism that allows him to question and criticise hierarchical power structures in his contemporary society.

Who is the peripheral individual?

Before we start our discussion, we need to note that there are several types of "marginalities" represented in the text, apart from the that of the disabled child. In a fictional reality dominated by struggle, many of the characters could be perceived as belong to the periphery of the

established order. The character known as "Righteous man" advocates the interests of a peripheral community in Shikoku against the interests of the nuclear power industry. Another character, the eccentric "Volunteer mediator", places himself between the two warring revolutionary parties with his message of reconciliation. Mori-father's lover, Ôno Sakuraô, may seem to belong to the privileged layers of society with her background as a TV personality. However, through her efforts to learn the truth of her party's politics, she alienates herself from the organisation. The two revolutionary factions, engaged in their illegal anti-authoritarian activities, could clearly be seen as belonging to the outskirts of society (we will discuss their role in detail in chapter 4). Mori-father, who was forced to leave his job due to radiation exposure, is not only a peripheral character because of his situation as unemployed; referring to his radiation accident as *hibaku,* a word usually reserved for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims, he evokes the plight of the many victims of the atomic bombs in 1945. There are, in other words, many characters in *Pinch runner* that are either portrayed at the outer margins of society, or in opposition to it.

When we choose to focus on one of them—the disabled child, represented by Mori and *our children*— there are two reasons for it. Firstly, we will focus on the character of Mori, because the text focuses on him. Although the narrator is Mori-father, and he is the one who features most prominently in the text, the text places Mori's existence in the centre, as we will se later in this chapter. However, it is evident already from the way Mori-father uses Mori's name to identifiy himself that Mori has a special significance in this story. After the "conversion" Mori beecomes the centre of attention in the little group that forms around him and Mori-father. When Mori and Mori-father speak to an audience of revolutionary activists, it is Mori's words (transmitted through Mori-father) that become the centre of attention. In this way, *Pinch runner* is a text that takes the existence of the disabled child as its point of departure.

Secondly, the marginality represented by the disabled child is of a somewhat different quality from those mentioned above. Whereas all of the above characters, through words or actions, are able to protest the discrimination and oppression to which they are subjected, *our children* do not have this ability. In this sense, they represent the most vulnerable among the vulnerable. Incapable of violence, they represent a group that cannot defend its own interest, nor fight back against discrimination and oppression. Mori, before the "conversion", is incapable of independent speech, and can only parrot words that are spoken to him first. He is therefore unable to speak—quite literally—on behalf of himself. He is dependent on others to speak for himself. When Mori-father narrates the adventure of Mori and himself, he is therefore also

acting as the voice of Mori. In this way, the text brings to light a peripheral group that is usually invisible in society.

In this sense, its insistence on the term "*our children*" (*wareware no kodomotachi*) is significant. It shows a resistance on the part of the text against accepting seemingly objective categories like "disabled", which all to clearly show the hierarchical logic that they are formed from. In the same way as "woman" is defined semantically from her difference (the letters "w" and "o") from "man", the "disabled" are defined by their difference from the "able". The text reverses this logic by taking "our children" as the standard from which "*the children who are different from our children*" are defined. When allowed to become the centre of focus, *our children* force us to reconsider not only their idenitities, but our own.

Our Children: beyond victimhood

In *Pinch runner* the vulnerability of *our children* is foregrounded by the violence that is omnipresent in the world they live in. While the story is farcical and absurd, this violence gives the text an air of pressing urgency at the same time. On a macroscopic level, the liberty of humankind is threatened by the totalitarian "human domination program" of "Big shot A". Throughout the country, the hot waste water from his nuclear power plants is threatening to destroy the environment. There are two revolutionary parties that are willing to use any means available to bring about an armed revolution. The atomic bombs they build represent the threat of total annihilation. Among themselves, the revolutionaries engage in brutal, inter-factional warfare. In one episode, Mori-father and "Volunteer mediator", who are caught in the middle of this conflict, are beaten half to death, whereas "Righteous man" is killed in an accident, while running away from pursuing activists. The violence is also visible in the microcosm of the family: On the last night before the "conversion" takes place, Mori-father beats Mori. When Mori's mother find them, she attacks Mori-father, and cuts him with a knife. The world described in the text is, in other words, a very violent place.

In this deluge of violence, it seems inevitable that those who cannot—or will not—fight, will inevitably become victims. This is the impression that the text communicates to us as we are introduced to Mori, Hikari, and the rest of *our children*:

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> *Our children* proceeded very slowly, walking in a single file. Tracing the edge of the field where *the*
> *children who are different from our children* continued their game, they came towards us, holding up
> both hands to protect their heads, looking like a group of infant captives. (Ôe, 1982b, p.12)

There is a clear sense of a hierarchical relationship between the two groups represented here. *Our children* on one hand, are consigned to the periphery of the playing field, so as not to be in the way of the "normal" children's ball game. The sense of inequality between the two groups is emphasised by describing the disabled children as "captives". The Japanese word *tôkôsha*, literally means "surrenderer". By describing how the children are walking "in single file" and holding their hands to their heads, the text clearly suggests *our children* in a relationship of subordination to the "normal" children. The word "infant" emphasises their innocence, and implies that their submission is a result of their inability to fight. In this sense, the above quote describes *our children* as victims of an oppressive system.

   If we look closer, however, we see that the picture that is drawn here, is ambivalent. Although the "captives" are suppressed and subdued, the word also implies that they are combatants, who have been seized after battle. In other words, the juxtaposition of "infant" and "surrenderer" is filled with an ambivalent tension: on one hand, *our children* are "infants", incapable of violence, but simultaneously they represent a rebellious enemy that must be subdued to uphold the existing order. If they are not forced to keep to the outskirts of the ball field, they will disrupt the ball game of the "normal" children. In this way, two contradictory images are superimposed onto each other. On one hand, *our children are* innocent victims of oppression. At the same time, they represent a threat to the order of the oppressors. The text resists portraying the disabled child as a purely defenceless and innocent creature, whose only conceivable role is that of the subordinate. The disabled child also represents a potential force that could subvert the power structures that causes it to be consigned to the "periphery".

The disabled child in Ôe's writing

This ambivalent representation of the disabled child is not unique to *Pinch runner*. To some extent we can find it in previous works where Ôe writes about this character. In the following we will concentrate on one of the texts in which the threatening aspect of the disabled child is emphasised; *A personal Matter*. In the afterword to *Pinch runner,* Ôe draws a line between these

two works, concluding that "with *Pinch runner* I have finished everything I started in *A Personal Matter*" (Ôe, 1982a, p 422). The connection between these two stories was also perceived by contemporary critics. In 1977, one critic wrote

> [Ôe] ceaselessly pursues the significance of a "personal matter", until it becomes a problem that concerns all humanity. Only in this way could a link between the unhappiness of the individual and the unhappiness of mankind be established. Ever since the appearance of this father-son-combination that is different from ordinary families, this idea has been one of the main themes that has run as an undercurrent in [the writing of] Ôe. (Kuritsubo, 1977, p.148)

Clearly, there is a line extending from *A personal matter* to *Pinch runner,* connecting these works. At the same time, there is a difference between them—the former concerns itself with the personal, the latter with global issues. As the above quote suggests, these two concerns are interconnected. It is therefore interesting to compare these two works, as the starting and ending points of his cycle of texts on the disabled son. By comparing it with *Pinch runner,* we will see how the vulnerable and defenceless, misshapen child has represented a threatening force from the beginning in Ôe's writing. At the same time we will see how these two texts address this ambivalence in radically different ways.

A Personal Matter was published in 1964, the year after the birth of Ôe's son, Hikari. The story focuses on the existentialist choice of a young man, known by his nickname" Bird", who becomes father of a severely handicapped child. The doctor informs him that the child, who has a protrusion at the back of his head that makes it look as if he has two heads, is suffering from brain hernia. Even if they perform surgery, the baby will either die or be reduced to a vegetative state. The choice he has to face is: whether to accept the child and go through with the surgery, or to kill it. In this situation, Bird seeks solace in a sexual relationship with Himiko, a female friend from high school. Together with Himiko, he kidnaps the child from the hospital and leaves it with a private abortionist, who has agreed to dispose of the unwanted child. However Bird realises that unless he saves the baby, he will always continue to run away from his responsibility. He therefore decides to accept the child and go through with the surgery.

No personal matter: *Pinch runner* as parody of *A personal matter*

In her study on the significance of the disabled son in Ôe's writing, Wilson treats the five narratives where this character appears, as "one large narrative in progress" (1986, p.83)

Stressing the continuity between these works, she reads *Pinch runner* as an extension of the thematics suggested in *A Personal Matter* (1986, p.86). However, Wilson's emphasis on continuity tends to neglect the implicit criticism of *A Personal Matter* that we find in *Pinch runner*. In a scene where Mori-father tells "Volunteer Mediator" of his relationship to "Patron", he recounts the circumstances around Mori's birth—in a way that clearly parodies *A Personal Matter*:

> The day Mori was born with a cranial defect, I took him to the university hospital, and waited on a bench in the waiting room for nine hours straight. What I was waiting for? For the announcement that "that little monster which you brought in here (*jisan suru*) has conveniently drawn its last breath" , ha ha. (Ôe, 1982b, p.226).

However, the child does not die, and Mori-father telephones "not to the family or to any of my friends, but to none other than 'the Patron' himself" (Ôe, 1982b, p.226). When he tells of the deformed child, "Patron" takes great interest in it, thinking it to be a result of Mori-father's prior exposure to nuclear radiation. When Mori-father explains that the doctor believes the two phenomena to be unrelated, however, the "The Patron" loses his interest, and arranges for Mori-father to take the child to a clinic to have it disposed of.

Like Bird in *A personal matter*, Mori-father too seeks solace in a sexual encounter. However, in contrast to the darkness of the sexual relationship between Bird and Himiko, Mori-father's erotic adventure is a quick and comical affair at a seedy Turkish bath[19]. Afterwards, he stays at the brothel until he misses his appointment at the clinic, before he goes back to his son and orders the doctors to perform the surgery.

In 3 pages[20], *Pinch runner* creates a farcical summary of the event that Ôe had devoted 252 pages[21] to in *A Personal Matter*. And the character who appears to be the most ridiculous in this parody, is the father. In *A Personal Matter* it is the existensial choice that is in focus: should Bird live as a free man, even at the cost of murdering a baby? Or should he accept the responsibility and burdens of fathering the defenceless child? As he explains to Himiko:

> If I want to confront this monster of a baby honestly instead of running away from it, I have only two alternatives: I can strangle the baby to death with my own hands or I can accept him and bring him up. I've understood that from the beginning but I haven't had the courage to accept it." (Ôe, 1994a, p.162[22])

This focus on the individual choice is turned upside down and ridiculed in *Pinch runner*. The

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19 The reference to the Turkish bath would be familiar to readers of Ôe's short story "Seventeen", which we will return to in chapter 3.
20 Pocket edition from Shinchôsha, cfr. Ôe, 1982b.
21 Pocket edition from Shinchôsha, cfr. Ôe, 1981.
22 All quotes from *A personal matter* are from John Nathan's excellent translation, cfr. Ôe, 1994a.

initial decision to murder the child is not taken by Mori-father at all, he passively follows the instructions of the Patron. In the same way Mori-father's decision to save the child, is described as an act of procrastination. And when he recounts what his motivation for changing his mind was, it is in strong contrast to the existensialistic philosophy of Bird:

> if someone had asked me where I'd found that kind of courage, I'm sure I'd told them something like this: *Just now I did something I'd never normally have done! I was a victim of the plutonium disease, which originated in the twentieth century America, and now I'm on my way to become a victim of syphilis, a disease which originated in the sixteenth century America. And the lesson I've learned from my actions is as follows:* **It's better to do it than not to do it!** (Ôe, 1982b, p.229, original emphasis)

In this way *Pinch runner* parodies the existential choice that is the focus of *A Personal Matter*. Mori-father's irrational motivation for saving the child, becomes a criticism of the way Bird's choice is legitimated in *A Personal Matter*. Himiko, criticising Bird's decision to save the life of a child that means "absolutely nothing to this world", asks him: "Do you suppose that would be for the baby's good?" (Ôe, 1994a, p.162). Bird's answer is revealing: "It's for my own good. It's so I can stop being a man who's always running away" (Ôe, 1994a, p.162) Bird's decision belongs to him alone; the existence of the child is peripheral to what his choice is about: self-redemption.

By focusing exclusively on the existentialistic choice of the father, *A personal matter* pushes the existence of the child into the background, until it is reduced to a device to provoke the existential choice of Bird. This suspicion is confirmed in the last paragraph, where the proud father relieved of his demons, looks into the face of a baby: "He wanted to try reflecting his face in the baby's pupils. The mirror of the baby's eyes was a deep, lucid gray and it did begin to reflect an image, but one so excessively fine that Bird couldn't confirm his new face (Ôe, 1994a, p.165). Inadvertedly, the text shows that the child exists only to confirm the existence of the father. The baby is saved, but only after eliminating the monster inside it.

A personal matter: Neutralising monstrosity.

In this way, we can see that this text represents a break with *A Personal Matter*, more than a continuation. It refuses to reduce the disabled children to instruments of other characters in the text. At the same time it resists the discrimination and oppression that force the disabled child into the role of the inferior. The central question is: How can the disabled coexist with the non-

disabled without becoming their subordinates? Before we look at how *Pinch runner* approaches this question, we will again return to *A Personal Matter,* as this is a question that is closely related to Bird's choice. Because of the deformity of the child, we could argue that his choice to embrace the child, also represents a choice of coexistence with what we may term as the "monstrous". This is emphasised by the expression "monster baby", which is used throughout the text to refer to the child. As in *Pinch runner,* the disabled child represents not only the defenceless, and vulnerable—it is at the same time a menacing, alien creature, as we see in the scene where Bird sees the deformity of the child for the first time:

> The baby continued to live, and it was oppressing Bird, even beginning to attack him. Swaddled in skin
> as red as shrimp which gleamed with the luster of scar tissue, the baby was beginning ferociously to
> live, dragging its anchor of a heavy lump. (Ôe, 1994a 1969, p.71)

Here, the monstrous qualities of the baby are emphasised: Its skin is described as something alien, non-human—it is something that it is "swaddled" in, rather than something that is part of it, in the colour of a shrimp. What we see is that the deviant form of the child makes it a threat, "oppressing" and "attacking" Bird. It is a human being- but through its deformity it also represents the non-human. It is a hybrid creature that not only threatens Bird's freedom, but also the metaphysical distinction between the "human" and the "non-human". Bird's choice of whether to accept the child or to kill it, is therefore something more than a choice between freedom and responsibility: It is a choice of either to coexist with the "monstrously" different, or to eliminate it.

It is therefore disappointing that *A Personal Matter* eventually chooses to circumvent this choice altogether. While Bird chooses to keep the child, the text chooses to neutralise its monstrosity. Instead of searching for a vision of how the "human" and the "non-human" can coexist, the text resolves the conflict between the two by transforming the "monster" into a regular human being. When the child undergoes surgery, the protruding lump on the back of its head is cut off, revealing that what was thought to be brain hernia, was in fact a benign tumor. While there is a possibility that the child will "grow up with an extremely low I.Q." (Ôe, 1994a, p.165), this fundamentally alters the nature of the child's disorder. In the case of brain hernia, a part of the brain protrudes from a defect in the cranium. The deformity, then, is part of something that is naturally part of the human body. A child with brain hernia therefore represents a human being that is radically differently shaped from what we consider the "human" shape. Its presence would therefore be subvertive, challenging the existing categories of "humanity" and "non-humanity". A tumor, on the other hand, while consisting of human

cells, is an excess, something that is not naturally part of the body. When it is cut away, the child becomes a "normal" human being again.

When the brain hernia turns out to be a tumor, the text cuts away—so to say—the pressing problem of whether or not to embrace monstrosity. It simply transforms the potentially subvertive creature into a child that now looks safely and conveniently, human: "A week after the operation the baby had looked almost human; the following week it had begun to resemble Bird." (Ôe, 1994a, p.164) Its otherness gone, it is reduced to an image of the father, subsumed into the non-threatening category of "humanity". While *A Personal Matter* is a text with many strong qualities, it eventually fails to address the issue of how the "monstrous" and the "normal" can be made to coexist.[23] It points to the gap that divides the disabled child from the rest of humankind, but it fails to explore the possibilities of closing it.

Pinch runner: Unleashing the monsters.

It is this gap, which forces the deviant existence of the disabled child into an inferior position, that *Pinch runner* seeks to explore and negotiate. However, in order to do any of this, it must first make the reader aware that there *is* a gap. Whereas *A Personal Matter* is, as the title suggests, a text which largely limits its scope to the immediate and personal, *Pinch runner's* scope extends far beyond the private sphere of the family. For Bird, the fact that he has the "monster baby" thrust upon him, forces him to face the decision whether to keep it or not. Similarly, in *Pinch runner*, the presence of *our children* is imposed upon us. The image of the children as "captives", or soldiers suggests the threat which they pose to the stability of the exisiting order. They are disruptive elements which must be contained, neutralised and silenced in order to sustain the privileged position of the "normal" children. One of the strategies that the text uses to oppose this neutralisation of the deviant, is therefore to emphasise the disruptive potential of *our children.*

In *Pinch runner* it is the character of Mori-Father who most vividly makes the reader imagine this potential. In the animated debate at a parent-teacher meeting, as spokesman to Mori, and

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23 In the novel *Letters to a nostalgic year* (*Natsukashii toshi e no tegami*), which Ôe published in 1987, he lets one of the characters suggest how the ending of *A Personal Matter* could be altered to avoid the criticism of the "happy ending". In this version, some of the passages which "normalise" the child are erased, leaving the ending more ambiguous. However, the observation that the child "looked almost human" after the operation, and that "it had begun to resemble Bird", are left unchanged (Ôe, 1987a, p.370—373).

self-appointed representative of all of *our children*, Mori-father paints an evocative picture of the latent, but suppressed conflict between *our children* and the rest of society. The background is an incident which took place at a school excursion to the supermarket. One of the boys from the lowest class gets his arm caught in the automatic door at the entrance. While teachers and shop clerks watch helplessly, Mori-Father steps in and rescues the frightened child. Following this event, the school arranges a parent-teacher meeting[24] to explain the incident to the parents of the children. However, when Hikari-Father, who narrates this episode, gets to the scene, Mori-Father is standing in front of the blackboard, lecturing the representatives from the school, in front of a steadily decreasing number of alienated parents and restless children.

> *Our children* will be put at the centre of the school community! I'm not saying, like the principal here misquoted me*,* that *our children* should rule over *the children who are different from our children*. Only that we put them at the centre! If not, there won't be any point, from the side of the school, in accepting our children and making special classes for them, will there? (Ôe, 1982b, p.47)

Seemingly, these are words which most people, not least the school authorities, should be able to relate to. Even considering that discrimination and prejudice against the disabled was more visible in Japanese society in the mid-1970's than today, the argument does not seem radical in itself. Within the context of a parent-teacher meeting at a school with special classes for the disabled, it is an entirely rational request—that the concern for *our children,* whose disabilities make them more vulnerable to discriminatory treatment than *the children who are different from our children*, be made a more central concern for the school.

However, in spite of the seemingly harmless nature of his suggestion, it is one which turns out to be highly subvertive and deeply disturbing. To put *our children* at the centre of the community, implies that instead of neutralising *our children* like "infant captives" and consigning them to the periphery of the field, they should be made *visible*, put where they cannot be ignored any more. It would also signify an active choice by the community of "normal" individuals to face the deviant and "monstrous", who are normally hidden away. Mori-Father's words therefore lead to a critical question of the fundamental educational policy of the special class: "Will *our children* really learn what they need in this classroom in order to go out and become members of society afterwards?" (Ôe, 1982b, p.47). Phrased differently; what are *our children* being educated *for?* Is the purpose of their education to make them fully integrated members of society, as equals of *the children who are different from our children?* To put *our*

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24 The word used in the original, is *hansei-kai*, which literally means "a self-examination meeting", and refers to a common form of meetings in which the group discusses and reflects critically to prevent similar errors from being repeated in the future.

children "at the centre" is an act that has ramifications far beyond the boundaries of the school community. It is an act of resistance against a social system in which the deviant are forced to the peripheries, where their existence is hidden from view. According to Mori-father, the education in the special class is formed on the premises of the "normal" society outside the school and not of *our children*. Moreover, part of this policy is to conceal the very fact that there is a conflict between these two interests, by making *our children* as invisible as possible to the outside world.

Structural violence

One of the problems that makes it difficult to recognise the existence of this discrimination, is the fact that it is structural. We remember that *our children* were introduced to us as "infant captives", an image that suggests that violence has been committed against them by some hostile authority. However, the violence they are subjected to, does not orginate from a single, identifiable source. While the "normal" children are cast in the role of the ruling class, leisurely continuing their ball game, they are not portrayed as direct *agents* of oppression. While there is violence, there is no violator to be seen. Similarly, the event that triggered the parent-teacher meeting, and that directly caused the suffering of the trapped child, was a mechanical door; no specific person could be held responsible for the accident. Yet, the supermarket and its electrical doors are results of the accumulated acts of human beings to rationalise business and make it more effective. It is designed to suit and accomodate the needs of the "normal", or "average" person. Built on the unspoken premise that this person is non-handicapped, both the supermarket and the mechanical door reflect social structures which leave no room for *our children*. As such, they represent acts of violence commited by one group against another. However, because the origins of the violence is dispersed, untraceable, diffuse, it is not usually recognised as such. It is embedded in the structures—political, institutional and linguistic—of society, and internalised by its members. We can see this in the carricatured educational motto of the principal at Mori's school: "to teach the harmonisation (*wakai*) of body and mind with nature and society" (Ôe, 1982b, p.48) Behind the humanistic ideal of man in "harmony" with nature and society, the spectre of structural discrimination looms. These structures are so self-evident to us that we—like the principal—do not consider the discrimination and hierarchical

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relations which they generate, for what they are—acts of violence by which one group asserts its power over another.

Pinch Runner starts by bringing this structural violence to the surface. Since this discrimination is hidden behind the facade of the rational, the arguments used to unmask it, are defiantly irrational.

> Isn't what you teach here how *our children* should dispose of their arms and legs so that they in the future can live as idiots who don't take up resources [*te no kakaranu baka*] in some peripheral society [*sumikko no shakai*]? Don't you think that in future society, this system will be rationalised, so that *our children* will learn to dispose not only of their arms and legs, but of all of themselves too, that is, ha ha, by teaching them how to commit suicide? If you really want to think about what's best for *our children,* you must teach them how to repel these selective powers in the future society, by taking up arms and defending themselves! (Ôe, 1982b, p.47—48)

The picture drawn is so caricated and absurd, so black in its comedy, that it leaves the reader (or at least *this* reader) with no choice but to laugh. However, it is an ambivalent laughter, mixed with the bitter realisation that the argument, for all its seemingly bizarre conclusions, is logically consistent. Moreover, his projections are not in fact as absurd as they may seem. Lindsley Cameron quotes a conversation with Ôe where he recalls:

> In the late 1960's, it became very fashionable in Japan to write about the future. One man wrote that we could look forward in the near future to a world where the handicapped would no longer exist. Progress would somehow cause them to disappear, and they would be abolished in the most natural way. How convenient! (1998, p.24)

Mori-Father's dystopic view of future society could be read as a parody of the sort of writing Ôe refers to here, and as an examination of the unspoken premises which they reveal.

However, the prospect of eradicating the handicapped was not merely a fanciful idea belonging to the world of science fiction. It was in fact expressed in Japanese legislature. In 1948, the Eugenic Protection Act (*yûsei hogo hô*) was ratified, for the purpose of preventing "the birth of children that are inferior from a eugenic point of view" (quoted in Yawata, 2006, p.114). This act had the same intention as the National Eugenics Act (*kokumin yûsei hô*) of 1940, based on the legislature from Nazi Germany which opened for the sterilisation of subjects who were considered bearers of inferior genes (Yawata, 2006, p.114). Under the Eugenics Protection Act, people with physical or mental disabilities could be subjected to sterilisation at the command of the Eugenic Protection Review Board (*Yûsei Hogo Shinsa Kai*) (Yawata, 2006, p.114). The fact that this law was not revised until 1996, shows how violence against the disabled was a part of the official structures of society as well.If Mori-Father's representation of

the relationship between *our children* and the society surrounding them seems overly antagonistic, this historical context should force us to reconsider. The image of *our children*—children with Down's syndrome and brain disorders—taking arms against society is obviously absurd, laughable and irrational. However, it is a logical extension of the idea of putting *our children* at the centre. If *our children* were to be truly considered equal to "normal" human beings, this should logically include the same right to defend themselves from oppression as the rest of us. Absurd? Yes, undeniably. But no more absurd than the fact that "normal" human beings reserve this right for themselves. Mori-Father's words therefore suggest that there is no objective reason why one group of human beings should be denied the rights that other groups take for granted.

Reevaluating the structure from a marginal perspective

It seems that Mori-Father's suggestion to put *our children* "at the centre", can only be accomplished by an attempt to reverse the power relation between themselves and the society surrounding them, by fighting back. The prospect is disturbing, and not one which we can easily accept, as we see from the principal's reply: "What you're saying is complete nonsense, like how the graduates from the special classes must one day form their own indepedent zone, and even keep an atomic bomb there" (Ôe, 1982b, p.48). An independent, nuclear state of idiots—the thought is shockingly hilarious, and comically disturbing. Our first reaction is to reject the thought out of hand—the very thought of giving control over weapons that could eradicate all of mankind to a group of people who are—by (our) definition—incapable of rational judgement, is simply too absurd. However, if we have already accepted the premise that there exists no self-given hierarchy between *our children* and the rest of society, we realise that the notion is not so absurd, after all. Or rather, we realise that what is absurd is not the image of the idiot nuclear state—which we so easily reject—but the fact that we just as easily tend to accept the idea of the same, terrifying weapons in the hands of the existing nuclear states of the world. Considering how superpowers cling to the power of weapons that with certainty, if used, could —and would— lead to their own destruction, the argument that *our children* should not be allowed the means to self-defence because they lack the ability to rational judgement, starts to

cling hollow.[25]

By comical and disturbing exaggeration of the consequences of placing *our children* "at the centre" of the community, the text forces the reader to reconsider the social structure he is part of, from the point of view of the periphery. Put in formalistic terms, the text defamiliarises the relation between the handicapped and the non-handicapped, by presenting this relation from the viewpoint of the other. As we saw in the discussion on *A Personal Matter,* the handicapped represents something hybrid and monstrous which is subvertive to the idea of a clear, unified, homogenous and naturally given category of "humanity". The handicapped are at the same time fundamentally different and fundamentally similar to such categories, and this results in a double standard towards the handicapped on the part of society. On one hand, *our children* are made part of the community of the school alongside with *the children who are different from our children*, but only as marginal members, "captives" who are consigned to the edge of the field. Moreover, as Mori-Father's argument and the principal's outraged reactions shows, the purpose of the education is to socialise *our children* according to the normative interests of society, to accustom them to a life on the margins, out of the way of society. By the exaggerated imagery of *our children* as a self-governed, nuclear nation, the text forces their existence into view, visualises their subvertive potential, and forces the reader to become aware of their existence.

We can therefore say that *Pinch Runner* reexamines the social structures of contemporary Japan from the viewpoint of the peripheries. It brings to attention the problem of discrimination and violence that is hidden in the social structures. This problem forms the starting point of Mori's and Mori-Father's adventure, as Mori-Father declares at the end of the parent-teacher meeting:

> Me and Mori won't come to school any more. I was thinking of reforming not only this special class,
> but the entire school system, but if things are going to be like this, there's no chance of any revolution,
> so me and Mori won't come to school any more. No, there's not a single person who think of *our*
> *children* as children who were chosen for a mission. (Ôe, 1982b, p.52)

The decision to leave the school, as we see, is motivated by a sense that a "revolution" of the system is necessary. Through the "conversion" they become "pinch runners of mankind", chosen for this mission. As we will return to in chapter 4, the question that *Pinch Runner* investigates, is; what kind of "revolution"? For while the structures of discrimination and

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25 The insanity of the "rational" leaders of the superpowers is brilliantly captured in Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr.Strangelove, or how I stopped worrying and started to love the bomb* from 1964, where the U.S. president, played by Peter Sellers, exclaims "Gentlemen, you can't fight here! This is the War Room!"

oppression may be proved to be arbitrary, the power imbalance is real. Unlike the revolutionaries of the far left *our children* do not even have a theoretical choice of succeeding in an armed revolution. *Realistically* speaking, the system cannot be overthrown. Therefore *Pinch Runner* must leave the "realistic" as it seeks to bridge the gap between "normal" and "deviant", "human" and "monster", *"our children"* and *"the children who are different from our children"*. The "revolution" it promotes, can only take place in the world of the "nonsensical". Yet, by forcing us to imagine this change, it can also become the trigger of a transformation—a "conversion"—of our perspective on reality.

3. Hidden centres: *Kuromaku*, emperor, father

In the previous chapter we discussed how *Pinch Runner* concerns itself with unequal and hierarchical power structures. We can say that the text is written in opposition to such structures, and that it is this concern that forms the propulsory drive of the text. To understand the project and approach of this text, we will look closer at how the causes of these hierarchical structures appear within *Pinch Runner*. In this chapter, we will look at how the text represents the "centre" of its power structures, or, put differently, the "problem" that the text seeks to investigate and resist.

Seemingly, *Pinch Runner* presupposes a clearly defined and identifiable "centre" in the character of "Big shot A", or "Patron". In the story of Mori and Mori-father's adventures to rescue mankind from his "human domination program", he appears as a representative of the forces of oppression. The character of "Big shot A"—modeled after real-world "string-pullers" or *kuromaku*—points to the specific and historical problem of structural corruption in Japanese politics. These problems, which had persisted throughout much of the postwar period, surfaced with the Lockheed Scandal in 1976. *Pinch Runner,* which was written at this time, clearly shows the influence of this case in its portrait of the powerful "big shot" who controls Japan from behind the scene.

However, while "Big shot A" seemingly represents the hidden "centre" of Japanese economy and politics, we will see how it depends for its power on a different "centre", which is hidden behind it—the imperial institution. Ôe had long been an outspoken critic of the imperial system. His previous texts had in particular concerned themselves with the image of the "pure emperor"—through which he explored the symbolic power of the imperial institution over the minds and imaginations of the Japanese people. In *Pinch Runner* Ôe, for the first time, places this symbolic power within a specific political and historical context.

Pulling the strings: Big shot A

To talk about power structures in the world of *Pinch Runner* without discussing the character of "Big shot A", would be both impossible and absurd. Although many participants are involved, the conspiracy against which the "converted" Mori-and-father pair fights ultimately revolves around this single character. We are first introduced to him in Mori-father's narrative as "Patron". In the original, this name is written with the *kanji* characters for the Japanese word *oyakata,* transcribed in *rubi* with the transliteration of the word "patron" (in its French pronounciation). We should note that the word *oyakata* can also be translated as "boss", "supervisor", or "master" ("Oyakata", 1995). It is made up of the characters for "parent" and "person". It is an appellation that not only reveals the respect of the speaker; like the word "patron", it implies a metaphorical father-and-son relationship. The patron/oyakata, in his role as the "father", is on one hand the benevolent sponsor of his "children", while representing authority at the same time. In Mori-father's narrative, we learn that before the "conversion", he was in the pay of "Patron", in exchange for providing him with material on bizarre incidents involving nuclear radiation from around the world.

As the narrative proceeds, Mori-father discovers that his information-gathering for "Patron" has in fact been part of a grand scheme that would make his employer the ruler of Japan. Gradually, the small group of activists that gathers around the Mori-and-father pair, learn the details of this "human domination program": It begins with the discovery that "Patron" is providing financial support to the two revolutionary parties for their development of an atomic bomb each. When one or both of the parties finish their bomb, they will use it to blackmail Japanese authorities, in an attempt to bring about a mass uprising. However, in this situation of social instability and chaos, where the existing ordinary power structures break down, "Patron" will be in the best position to turn the situation to his advantage. Using his vast network to secure the safety of the citizens, and the imperial family, he will make himself saviour of the Japanese people. And when the situation is brought under control, he will carry out a coup d'état with the help of the Self-Defence Forces, making himself absolute ruler over Japan.

As we can see, the scale of the intrigue of *Pinch Runner* is nothing short of grandiose, and it involves a large number of actors. And at the centre of the web, pulling all the strings, is "Big shot A". Not only is he the "shadow director" (*kage no jitsuryokusha*) of the company which owns one-third of all privat nuclear power plants in Japan, his influence extends well into Korea (Ôe, 1982b, p.241). Moreover, his connections range absurdly wide; from his funding of nuclear

arms race of the two warring factions, to the mysteriousYamame Army. Reference is even made to his contacts with the Black Panthers in the U.S. (Ôe, 1982b, p.349). However, his influence also reaches down to the microscopic level, as when he tries to manipulate Mori-father to have Mori killed after his birth. In other words, he is represented as the central, pivoting point around which all revolves, a classic antagonist, who, through his scheming sets the events of the text in motion.

The presence of this "central point" is the main difference between *Pinch Runner and* Ôe's previous texts. One of the characteristics of Ôe's writing until this point, is that the power structures represented in his texts, are ambivalent. In her analysis of "Prize Stock" (1958), Tachibana emphasises that while it is a story of encounter between Japan and the U.S.—which at the time was in every way an unequal relation—Ôe deliberately chooses ambivalent characters to represent each side (Tachibana, 2002). On one hand, the choice of a black American soldier resists the stereotypical image of the U.S. held by most Japanese, as a country "where power, including the military power, was held only by members of the white race" (Tachibana, 2002, p.38). The villagers, on the other hand, are aggressors toward the soldier, but are also themselves victims of discrimination, as members of a *buraku* community. While "Prize Stock" obviously concerns itself with power structures, it constructs no single "centre" to which these structures can be traced. The hierarchies between oppressor and oppressed in the text are fluid, constantly in motion, problematised. While this single example obvioulsy cannot represent the entirety of Ôe's pre-*Pinch Runner* production, it does suggest how Ôe's texts, from the time of his literary debut, resist being broken down into clear structures of "centre" and "margins", "victims" and "victimisers", and the like. In this respect, *Pinch Runner* seems to deviate from his previous works.

When discussing the background of this character, we quickly realise that it is open to many different interpretations. The very absurdity of the scale of the "human domination program" means that "Big shot A" could be understood as a metaphor for any and all forces that threaten the freedom of human beings. On the morphological level, the "A" of "Big shot A" brings the powerful presence of "America" to mind. Nakamura, for instance, argues that while the novel as a whole is "way too nonsensical" (1995, p. 154), the image of "Big shot A" could be said to be somewhat realistic as a "cheap parody of the political leaders of American imperialism, that seek to rule the world through the military force of nuclear weapons" (Nakamura, 1995, p.152). Others have regarded the powerful, father-like character of "Patron" as a parody of the Japanese emperor (Samuel, 1981, p.220). When we read *Pinch Runner* in the context of its contemporary

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history, however, a specific model for this character becomes more apparent. On several occasions, "Big shot A" is referred to in the original as a *kuromaku*—a "wirepuller". While this could be understood as a general reference to powerful and manipulating individuals, it is also a word with specific, historical connotations. In the context of postwar Japanese history, *kuromaku* was used to refer to specific notorious and powerful individuals who operated primarily outside the official institutions, who used their wide range of connections in political and financial circles, to manipulate the course of Japanese politics and economy. While the phenomenon had its roots back to the immediate postwar period, it is no coincidence that Ôe's "big shot" first appeared in 1976; this was the year of the Lockheed Scandal, an incident which with great force brought the role of the *kuromaku* to the attention of the Japanese public.

The Lockheed Scandal

The Lockheed incident, which was made public in February 1976, was an international scandal concerning the Lockheed Corporation's use of illegal methods and bribes to influence officials in several countries—including Japan, Italy and Holland—to purchase their TriStar airbuses (Johnson, 1986, p.1). In Japan, the case caused strong reactions, as it forced into public view the shady practices which had dominated the country's politics during the postwar period. It began with the U.S. Senate hearings on February 4th and 6th in 1976, where Lockheed executives confessed to having paid excessive sums to their middle man in Japan, Kodama Yoshio, to smooth the sales of their aircraft to All Nippon Airways (ANA) (Baerwald, 1976, p.817). Their testimonies showed that not only had Lockheed paid off the ANA president; among the prominent figures that had received bribes was the prime minister Tanaka Kakuei, the secretary general of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the MITI minister and the Minister of Transportation—among others (Johnson, 1986, p.14). Following the U.S. Senate hearings, the Japanese Diet soon conducted its own investigation, which lead to the indictment of several officials, including prime minister Tanaka.

Written and published in the same year as the Lockheed scandal, the references to the *kuromaku* figure of "Big shot A" in *Pinch Runner* points to the corrupt practices that were uncovered in this case. Within the textual reality, everything and everyone is under the influence of "Big shot A". By comparison, there is strikingly little mention of the role of the official

institution of power in the text; like everybody else they appear only as pawns in the "human domination program". In this sense, the text could be read as a criticism of a corrupt system where money and connections dominates. However, the sheer scale of "Big shot A"'s sphere of influence, seems to suggest that the target of criticism in the text is not limited to the individuals and insitutions involved in this single case. Indeed, it was an important event, which, when it became known sent shock waves through Japanese society. However, what caused the Lockheed scandal to prove so disturbing was not so much the fact that leading members of the government had been involved in a isolated corruption case. It was the fact that it revealed a network of corruption that had become a part of the country's political and economic structure.

This becomes clearer as we look at the background of Kodama Yoshio. He was one of the *kuromaku* who had a prominent role in this case, and one of the obvious sources of inspiration for Ôe's "big shot." He had been Lockheed's agent in Japan since the late 1950's, and the transactions that were brought to light in 1976 were not the first he had been involved in on the company's behalf. In 1960, for instance, he acted as go-between when the Kishi government purchased 230 F-104 Starfighters from Lockheed to the Self-Defence Forces (Johnson, 1986, p.13). However, his activities were not limited to his agreement with this one company. Johnson describes Kodama as "one of Japan's most notorious prewar political strongmen and postwar unofficial intermediaries between the world of politics and the worlds of gangsters, bullies for controlling stockholders' meetings ... and fanatical right-wingers" (1986, p.12). A short summary of his personal history shows how his work behind the scenes of Japanese politics is intimately connected with the emergence of the power structures of the country in the postwar period.

Kodama was stationed in Shanghai during the war, where his work for the Japanese Navy made him an enormously wealthy man (Johnson, 1986, p.13). After briefly working as adviser for Prime Minister Higashikuni, he was imprisoned by the occupation authorities as a class A war crimes suspect (Johnson, 1986, p.13). However, he was never prosecuted, and after his release, he went on to become one of Japan's most influential *kuromaku* for the three first decades of the postwar period. With the fortune Kodama had gathered in China, he helped finance the rebirth of Yoshida Shigeru's Liberal Party in 1950—one of the predecessors of the Liberal Democratic Party (Johnson, 1986, p.13). Moreover, he supplied funds for the governments of Hatoyama Ichirô and Kishi Nobusuke in the mid-1950's, as the LDP established its grip on political power in Japan—a hegemony that would go on uninterrupted for nearly four decades. Throughout the postwar period, Kodama played an active part in forming both the

formal and informal power structures of Japanese society. When we read the reference to *kuromaku* like Kodama in *Pinch Runner* against this historical background, we begin to see that they point beyond the single incident of the Lockheed scandal. They point to the long-existing, deep structures in Japanese politics that made the power of "Big shot A", and Kodama, possible.

Based on what we just discuss, the conclusion seems to be that *Pinch Runner* is a story of how the Mori-and-father pair defeat the hidden forces of corruption in Japan, represented by an archtype *kuromaku,* "Big shot A". The text's ending could easily be read to support this. In the last scene, Mori-father and Mori meet "Patron" face to face in his hospital room. "Patron", who knows he does not have much longer to live, makes a proposal to Mori-father: To help him buy off one or the other of the revolutionary factions and force a merger between them, to ensure the realisation of his "human domination program" before he dies. Mori-father, taken aback by the turn of events, decides to accept the offer. However, at that same moment, Mori takes action— striking "Patron" dead, he grabs the money, escapes through the window, and burns himself with "Patron"'s money. Seemingly, the text ends with a sense of closure: The tyrant is dead, and the money he would use to realise his "human domination program" is reduced to ashes. In one contemporary review, the critic lamented the fact that the "holy, disabled child" (*seinaru shôgaiji*) Mori, is turned into a "hero", who combats evil through force (Ueda, 1977, p.13). While I agree that Mori's violent action is problematic, I believe that it is a misconception to understand his character as a "hero" in this case. His final actions may seem to be considered "heroic" in so far that they seem to "liberate" humankind from the oppressor.

However, we also need to consider that ultimately, Mori's actions are futile. "Patron" who is killed, is no longer the powerful, mighty tyrant, threatening with world domination. When Mori-father and Mori, dressed up as a baby and an old man, are admitted into the hospital where "Big shot A" lies, it is the first time Mori-father meets his "Patron" after the "conversion". It is also the first time the reader is presented with this character through direct description, rather than the hearsay of the other characters. The scene represents an "unveiling" of what has until now been clouded; it is in this scene where Mori, Mori-father, and the reader, learn the "truth" of the figure who has exerted his power from the shadows throughout the story. However, the meeting turns out to be far from the expected climax:

> Well, when we came into the large sickroom, the old man, his head all wrapped in bandages, turned only his drowsy eyes our way, you see, from the bed five meters away, trying to take in our disguises with his eyes. "Patron", who had such a Western-looking, manly and stately face, now had the face, though still stately, like one of those strong, old women [*rô-jojôfu*] who were born in the Meiji period.

> The second I saw "Patron" like this, I told Mori telepathically, **this is a pregnant, old woman, what the hell has happened!?** (Ôe, 1982b, p.383, original emphasis)[26]

The "truth" of the man who threatens to dominate all of Japan, runs contrary to the expectations of Mori-father. A transformation has taken place: The powerful and dominant "big shot" has been transformed by cancer into a bedridden and debilitated "old woman". This metamorphosis is emphasised by the juxtaposition of the male and female, western and Japanese. The image of "Patron" whom Mori-father knew is associated with a "western" aesthetic male ideal. The word used for "western" in the original is *batakusaku,* literally "smelling like butter"—an expression that emphasises the sense of foreignness. The image of "the West" in the Japanese postwar context is closely related to the image of the U.S. These descriptions brings to mind not only the intrusion of American interests in Japanese society that the Lockheed incident revealed—it evokes an image of the U.S. as the conquering, "male" power that occupied Japan in 1945[27]. As the attention is turned to "Patron" of the present, this image is transformed into "one of those strong, old women who were born in the Meiji period". We should note that the femininity in this case does not translate directly into such categories as submissiveness and frailty. However, the image of a "pregnant, old woman" is far removed from that of the "western-looking, manly" conqueror that "Patron" had previously been.

   The transformation of "Patron" is also emphasised on the bodily level: Once in control of the actions of all others, he is now no longer in control of his own bodily functions (Ôe, 1982b, p.396). Wilson dicusses the use of scatological elements such as defecation and urination as a part of Ôe's influence from Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism (1986, p.96—104). She writes:

> In grotesque realism the bodily functions are always affirmed in an "all-popular," festive, utopian setting. The cosmic, social and bodily elements are parts of an indivisible whole and are presented not in a private, egotistical form or isolated from other aspects of life, but as something universal, representing all people. (1986, p.96)

By "debasing" the elevated through associating it with the crude and bodily, it is not only "degraded", but also "materialized". In this way, she claims, the differences between high and low are reconciled in the arena of festive laughter. On the character of "Big shot A", aka

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26 The hospital scene of "Patron" evokes another image of Kodama Yoshio: Shortly after the disclosure of the Lockheed Scandal, he fell ill with a disease affecting his brain, and subsequently could not appear when the Japanese Diet's Budget Committee conducted its own hearings on the incident (Baerwald, 1976, p.824—825).

27 Dower discusses the metaphors of masculinity and femininity in the context of the U.S.-Japan relationships in the occupation period. From a U.S. perspective, he notes, "Japan—only yesterday a menacing, masculine threat—had been transformed, almost in the blink of an eye, into a compliant, feminine body on which the white victors could impose their will" (1999, p.138).

"Patron", she writes: "The patron, who is in reality a terrifying authority figure, becomes the clown to be mocked in this carnivalesque world: the buffoons are there to uncrown the dying 'king,' to let a new 'king' reign" (Wilson, 1986, p.102). While I agree that Ôe in the last chapter of *Pinch runner* debases the character of "Big shot A" and turns him into a clown, I believe that her analysis fails to grasp what is the core of the power structures represented in *Pinch runner*. For while the events of the Lockheed scandal surely provided abundant material for criticising the current political situation in Japan, it seems somewhat odd that Ôe would go to the lengths he does in *Pinch runner* to criticise a practice that, after all, was well known in Japanese society already. We need to look closer at what lies behind these structures, to look for what it is that made Ôe conceive of them as so threatening in this text.

At first, *Pinch Runner* appears to be a story of Mori and Mori-father's quest to defeat "Big shot". However, when Mori strikes "Patron" dead, it is an act with little or no practical value—the enemy is already immobilised with cancer and waiting for death. While the "tyrant" is overthrown, there is a sense that somehow, nothing has been achieved. In a sense, this coincides with the outcome of the Lockheed incident. While the case caused a scandal in Japan, and lead to the indictment of several of the individuals responsible, the power structures that had enabled the corruption to take place, remained largely unchanged. For instance, among the politicians who were implicated by the testimony of the Lockheed president, only one was not reelected in the next general elections (Johnson, 1986, p.15). Prime minister Tanaka Kakuei, who was convicted in this case in 1983, remained a Diet member and *de facto* leader of his LDP faction, although no longer a member of the party (Johnson, 1986, p.21). Even more telling is the fact that in 1979—80, three years after Lockheed, an almost identical corruption case took place (Johnson, 1986, p.16). While these events took place after the writing of *Pinch Runner*, it would not take too much insight to guess that these questionable practices of Japanese politics and economy would not be remedied overnight. While Ôe's text could be read as a criticism of corrupt political practices that threatened the foundations of democracy in Japan, it is also clear that it does not present corruption in itself as the main source of the problem. As its conclusion suggests, "Big shot A" is not the real problem that needs to be addressed. To see the real problem, we need to look beyond him, to find the source from which he derives his power: The imperial institution.

A conspicuously inconspicuous emperor

What is striking when we look at the references made to the emperor in *Pinch runner*, is how diffuse his role in the text is. Yet, while the references are relatively rare and seemingly peripheral, they show that the emperor—or rather, the emperor system—plays a signicant part in the plot which the protagonists are about to unravel. Paradoxically, we can say that the position of the emperor in *Pinch Runner* is both central and peripheral. "Central", because the emperor system represents the symbolic energy source that powers "Big shot A"'s plan, and "peripheral", because its role in the power struggle is entirely passive, as a pawn in the "human domination program". In the following, we will have a look at how the emperor system is represented in *Pinch Runner* as the hidden "centre" of power structures that Mori and Mori-father are up against. To illuminate this issue, we will also look at how Ôe's approach to the issue of the emperor system in this text differs from that of preceding texts.

There are few direct references to the emperor in *Pinch Runner*. Throughout the text, the focus is on "Big shot A"; for instance, two of the ten chapters of the text are devoted—as their titles suggest—to "A manifold analysis" of this character. The imperial institution is mentioned only within the framework of his "human domination program". Before we can analyse its role in the text, we will therefore have to look at the connection between "Big shot A" and the imperial institution. During the "manifold analysis" of "Big shot A", the little group that gathers around Mori-father meets at a Korean barbeque restaurant to discuss the nature of the man they are up against. It is in this context that "Righteous man", a sesasoned veteran of the Shikoku anti-nuclear movement, sees the connection between "Big shot A" and the imperial institution:

> You know what I think, I think that there's an air hole, wide open in the direction of the imperial *family*! I know there're heaps of big shots and wirepullers in the middle of things, but, we've got them out in the districts too, you know! These guys, they do stuff, right? Stuff we can't really understand with our common sense! Personal interests, private greed—that we can understand. You don't have to worry about those things, they never amount to much! But then, from the top of this lump [*katamari*] of private interest and greed that's inflated to the point of bursting, it's like there's a mirage rising. It's twisting and turning, but when you stare at it for a while, you can see the air hole, in the direction of the imperial *family*! (Ôe, 1982b, p.245)

The argument of "Righteous man" is somewhat convoluted, and it is not altogether clear what this "air hole" consists of, how it works, and in what way it ties "Patron" to the imperial family. In this respect it is significant that the main metaphor for this relationship—the "air hole"—is an image which cannot be resolved into a clear and structured model of the relationship

between its parts. It does suggest a concrete image of a "lump" (*katamari*) of the "private interest" (*shirishiyoku*) of "Patron". From the top of this "lump", an "air hole" opens up, suggesting that what is contained on the inside is released, and put in contact with something on the outside.

However while the opening of the "air hole" implies some sort of movement "in the direction of" the imperial family, it does not specify whether the movement is one-way, or if it is reciprocal. The word for "air hole" used in the original, *kaza-ana,* can refer either to a ventilation hole in a building, or to a cavern through which the wind blows. However, the use of this word in combination with the verb *nukeru*—which can variously be translated as "to pass between" or "open up to"—brings to mind a fixed expression, *kaza-ana o akeru,* literally "to open an air hole". The connection with this expression is ambivalent—on one hand, the verb *nukeru* is semantically related to *akeru,* in that both can refer to opening up something that is closed. In one of its uses, the expression *kaza-ana o akeru* refers to opening a hole—with the medium of a sharp object or a firearm—in someone's body. However, the expression can also refer to bringing in change or fresh perspective into a stagnated or deadlocked situation —"letting in fresh air", metaphorically speaking. Yet, none of these meanings seem to bring any clarity as to what the "air hole" connecting "Big shot A" and the "imperial *family*" consists of. This suggests that what is significant here is not the *nature* of the movement between these "private interests" and the imperial institution, it is the *direction* of the movement. The reason that "Big shot A" represents a threat is not primarily his personal power, but his ability to open up a connection from his own, private ambitions, towards the force field of the "imperial *family*".

As "Righteous man" continues his argument, he elaborates on how the "imperial *family*" fits into the plans of "Big shot A". In his work as the leader of the Shikoku anti-nuclear movement, "Righteous man" explains, he has been active in the struggle to stop the building of a nuclear power plant in his home region. However, when he learns that "Big shot A" is the real power behind the nuclear industry, in Japan, he concludes that there will be no ways of stopping the building of the power plant:

> And when the completed power plant starts full-scale operation, without a soul giving a thought to the hot coolants[28], the imperial *family* will be over right away to inspect it! What will happen then? All Japanese people will kneel towards the southern tip of Shikoku and worship! With the imperial *family*

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28 Water used to cool down the nuclear reactors. While it is not necessarily contaminated in itself, the amount of heated water spilled from a nuclear power plant can significantly change local water temperature levels, causing disturbance in the biosystem.

energy combined with the nuclear energy in this supersized demonstration, over a hundred million people will kneel in front of their TV sets and worship, I'm telling you! (Ôe, 1982b, p. 246)

As we read these lines, the role of the imperial institution in the scheme of "Big shot A" becomes clearer. The "imperial *family* energy" represents a symbolic force field towards which the entire Japanese nation gravitates. It is the "centre" of the structure, around which all else is aligned. The juxtaposition of this "energy source" with nuclear energy emphasises the magnitude of its symbolic force. It is by exploiting this "energy" that "Big shot A" intends to realise his "human domination program". In this way, Ôe links the problem of the political order, suggested through the references to the Lockheed scandal, to the problem of the emperor system.

"Seventeen": Examining the shadow of the emperor system

Pinch Runner is by no means the first Ôe story that concerns itself with the symbolic power of the emperor. The impact of the emperor system on Japanese society had at this time long been one of his preoccupations, both in fictional texts and in essays. This tendency is particularly visible in such stories as "Seventeen" and *The day He himself shall wipe my tears away* (hereafter *My tears*). While these texts are stylistically quite different from each other, both represent investigations of the theme of the "pure emperor" (*junsui tennô*), which Ôe explored in his writing at this time. By this he meant a symbolic image of the divine and absolute emperor that he believed influenced the minds of the Japanese people throughout the postwar period (Ôe, 1991a, p.8) . When comparing these two texts' approach to the emperor system with that of *Pinch Runner,* two major differences become evident. Firstly, whereas the figure of the emperor features as a central image in both "Seventeen" and *My tears*, his position in *Pinch Runner* is almost conspicuously inconspicuous. Secondly, in the first two stories, Ôe's treatment of the emperor system focuses exclusively on its psychological impact on the protagonist. In *Pinch Runner*, however, this aspect is toned down. Instead, he emphasises the historical and political context of which the imperial institution is a part. In the following, we will examine how Ôe develops his approach to the issue of the emperor system in "Seventeen" and *My tears*. This will form the background of our discussion of the representation of the emperor system in *Pinch Runner.*

Among the three stories we will look at here, "Seventeen", which was published in 1961, is the one in which Ôe most directly addresses the issue of the emperor system. This text is also historically interesting, since its publication and reception showed the impact that the emperor system still had on Japanese society. The first part of "Seventeen" opens with the seventeenth birthday of the protagonist, who is a young, insecure boy with an obsessive habit of masturbation. A loser at school and alienated from both family and friends, he dreams of finding something outside himself to seek refuge in. One day he attends the meeting of an ultra-rightist organisation. Impressed by the forceful character of its leader, he starts to sympathise with the group, eventually becoming a pro-emperor, violent activist. The second part, which is subtitled "The death of a political youth"[29], follows him as he gradually grows restless with what he considers the complacency of the rest of the members of his group. More and more he devotes himself to his worship of the divine emperor. Seeking a way to become one with the emperor, he assasinates a political leader and commits suicide in prison.

As with many of Ôe's texts, "Seventeen" was written in direct response to a specific political and historical event. In October 1960, the chairman of the Socialist party, Asanuma Inejirô, was stabbed to death while holding a public speech. The killer was Yamaguchi Otoya, a seventeen-year old member of an ultra-nationalist group, who subsequently hanged himself in prison. The murder sent shock waves through the Japanese society, and provoked Ôe to write this story, which was published in the literary journal *Bungakukai* in January and February the following year. Many of its details are very closely modelled after the real event—most notably, the scene of the murder itself, which in the text is described in particular detail. Other details have been altered, like the fact that the assasination victim is chairman of the Progressive, not the Socialist Party. However, it was not enough to stop the violent reaction from extremist right-wing groups, who objected in particular to the sexual images which Ôe attached to the protagonist's relationship with the emperor. Ôe received threatening letters, some threw rocks at his house, and groups of right-wingers screamed threats outside his house (Miyoshi, 2002, p.vii). In the end, Ôe's editor at *Bungakukai* chose to print a formal apology in a later issue of the magazine. To this day, only the first half of the story has been reprinted.

This happened only short time after Fukazawa Shichirô's short story "A dream tale of refined elegance"[30] caused a similar uproar. The story is narrated as a dream where armed revolution is taking place, and includes scenes where the decapitation of the imperial family is described in graphical—and rather comical—detail. After its publication in *Chûô Kôron* in December 1960,

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29 *Seiji shônen shisu*, cfr. Ôe, 1961a.
30 *Fûryûmutan*, cfr. Fukazawa, 1960.

a right-wing extremist, also seventeen years old, broke into the house of the president of the Chûô Kôron publishing company, Shimanaka Hôji. As Shimanaka himself was absent, the youth stabbed his wife and the family maid, who subsequently died (Treat, 1994, p.100). The impact of the incident was tremendous, as Treat points out:

> After the Shimanaka incident Chûô Kôron, once proud of its history of defending freedom of expression, canceled a special issue on the emperor system another of its house magazines had planned. Many observers date the start of the so-called chrysanthemum taboo—a reference to the design of the imperial seal—against public debate over the post-World War II emperor from the Shimanaka incident (1994, p.101).

Clearly, this episode must have influenced Ôe when he wrote "Seventeen". It also helps explain why Ôe's publisher chose to print the apology for the story when pressure rose. The fact that "Seventeen" still has not been reprinted in its original form testifies to the coercive power of the emperor system in Japan. However, while Ôe withdrew "The death of a political youth" from print, he did not stop writing on the subject of the emperor, and repeatedly articulated his opinion on the matter in essays in the following years.

In a later essay, Ôe wrote that his purpose in writing "Seventeen" was to probe the "image and shadow" of the emperor, which he claims to exist omnipresently both "outside and within" every Japanese person. (Ôe, 1966, p.381) Part of his strategy to realise this project is to make the reader take part in the protagonist's intense experiences of becoming one with the divine emperor. Through the first-person narrative, we are made to share these experiences, which take on a religious and erotic character. Soon after his rightist "conversion", the protagonist undergoes a "decisive experience" (*ketteiteki na taiken*) as he calls it himself. Given money by the group's charismatic leader Sakakibara, he goes to a Turkish bath to get a sexual massage. As he reaches climax, he has a vision:

> "My manhood was the light of the sun, my manhood was a flower, I was seized by the intense pleasure
> of orgasm, as I again saw the golden being floating in the pitch-black sky, ahh, ohh, Your Majesty!
> Your Majesty, the radiant sun, ahh, ahh, ohh! (Ôe, 1961b, p.180)

As Komori Yôichi points out in his analysis of this passage, the black irony is obvious; the "decisive experience" of the protagonist's mystical union with the ineffable emperor is superimposed of the image of an insecure seventeen-year-old having his penis rubbed by a prostitute (2002, p.87). The effect of the passage is ambivalent; on one hand, it makes the emperor-worship of the protagonist laughable. For the protagonist, this "decisive experience" represents a rite of passage—from this point his devotion to his group and the emperor becomes

total. In this way, he believes that he leaves the insecurity and weakness of his older self behind. To the reader, however, it is obvious that this new-found conviction is just a way of running away from his problems. In this way, he becomes even more pathetic in the eyes of the reader. At the same time, his constant escape from himself evokes a sense of sympathy. While he commits gruesome acts as a member of Sakakibara's group, he also appears as a victim of an ideology that feeds upon his weakness.

While "Seventeen" effectively probes how the "image and shadow" of the emperor affects the young protagonist, the text falls victim to its own strategy. The first-person perspective does not allow any distance between the narrator and the image of the emperor. While the text succeeds in probing the effects of the emperor system, it is ultimately unsuccessful in demystifying it. Throughout the text, the image of the divine emperor is repeatedly placed firmly and obsessively in the "centre", so to say, of the textual universe. In the above mentioned essay, Ôe claims that the problem of the emperor system in Japan, is the central role it inhabits in the imaginations of the Japanese (Ôe, 1966). In other words, if a fictional text is to be effective as an act of resistance against this system, it needs to *de*centralise the image of the emperor. While "Seventeen" can clearly be read as criticism of the emperor system, it is not able to do this. In the second part of the story, the protagonist emerges into the sunlight after joining a raid on a zengakuren rally in Hiroshima, he notices that "The sun, as if it hadn't budged an inch, was still shining from its apex, like the Emperor." (Ôe, 1961a, p.17) We could say that also within the power structure of the text, the image of the emperor shines from its "apex"—immovable and immutable. In spite of the implied criticism and irony, he does not budge an inch from its fixed point. While "Seventeen" is a vivid exploration of the effects of the emperor system, Ôe removes and elevates it above both history and politics in the process.

My tears: Resisting realism

Thus it comes as no surprise that when Ôe started to write a fictional text that concerned itselves with the emperor system again in the 1970's, it was in a very different vein from "Seventeen". Whereas "Seventeen" had inadvertently confirmed the object it sought to overturn, *My tears* is a text where Ôe clearly seeks to undermine the image of the emperor. Like

"Seventeen", it is a first-person narrative, where the narrator is a mentally unstable man who believes himself to be suffering from cancer. The text was written in response to Mishima's failed attempt to reinstate the emperor as head of political and military power, and his subsequent suicide—an event which served as yet a reminder to Ôe of the strong impact which the image of the emperor continued to have on the Japanese. Throughout the extremely convoluted narrative, he tells the story of his relationship to his father, who died in a pathetic attempt of an uprising in the chaos surrounding the end of the war. In this story, the image of the emperor is layered on that of the father, creating an ambivalent image. On one hand, the reverence of the protagonist towards this father/emperor character, is vividly recreated. At the same time, the obsessive personality of the narrator makes it impossible for the reader to sympathise with him in the way the narrative of "Seventeen" does. This effect is reinforced by the complexity of the narrative structure. The narrator tells his story to a person referred to as "the acting executor of the will", who has taken on the task of acting as his scribe. However, throughout the text, this person interferes and contradicts his narrative, leaving his credibility as a narrator shaken.

The critic Kuruko Kazuo finds the lack of concrete imagery and tendency towards metafictional writing in *My tears* and *Moon man*[31] lamentable, and regards these works as inferior to "Seventeen". (Kuroko, 1998, p.39) What upholds and supports the symbolic power of the emperor system, he claims, is the mentality of the "half-democratic common people" (*han-minshushugteki na shomin*), stirred by the constant coverage of the imperial family in magazines and journals. Therefore, he claims, the proper way to criticise the emperor system in fiction, is not through metafiction, but through a realist novel with "a concrete framework" (*gutaiteki na wakugumi*), which can "pierce the sentiments of the common people". (Kuroko, 1998, p.39) What underlies Kuroko's argument is an implicit insistence that the genre of literary realism somehow is an inherently more powerful and effective form of writing than, for instance, metafiction (on one occasion, Kuroko equates the terms "reality"—*riaritî*—and "power to convince"—*settokuryoku,* by placing the latter as explanatory characters, *rubi,* for the former). While it is true that *My tears* is a difficult work to understand, Kuroko fails to consider that the resistance it shows to be broken down into a "concrete framework" like that of "Seventeen" represents a conscious act on Ôe's part. By resisting the "realistic" approach of a straight-forward, first-person narrative, *My tears* succeeds in exploring the protagonist's image of the emperor, while simultaneously deconstructing this image.

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31 A short story published in the same volume as *My tears,* cfr. Ôe,1991b.

Pinch runner: Getting familiar with the emperor

However, while Ôe had begun to deconstruct the image of the emperor, he still allowed the figure of the emperor to exist as an essentially "spiritual" being. In the textual world, this figure is never made part of a historical and political context. In all his transcendent glory, the emperor exists only in direct relationship to the narrator. As Susan Napier points out, the emperor represents "a symbol of missed experiences, missed opportunities, missed lives, and missed 'sweet certainties,' to use Nathan's expression" (Napier, 1991, p.85—86). This is also the conclusion which Kuroko arrives at, although from a different angle.

> I believe that the failure of these two works [*My tears* and *Moon man*] lies in the fact that, although the
> 'emperor system' was originally a form of government, this foundation is abstracted away. The problem
> of the postwar symbolic emperor system (*shôchô tennôsei*) is considered only in terms of the concept
> of the pure emperor, which only comes into being in the relation between the emperor and the
> individual" (Kuroko, 1998, p.40)

Kuroko goes on to discuss *Pinch Runner* Pointing out how Ôe portrays the "imperial *family*" as mere pawns in "Patron"'s game for power, that this captures the "essence (*honshitsu*) of the 'emperor system'" (Kuroko, 1998, p.42). He notes that through this novel, Ôe has created a critical portrait of the emperor which shows its inseperability from the question of political authority and power (Kuroko, 1998, p.42). In the following, we will look closer at how Ôe places the imperial institution within a historical and political context.

The first thing that catches our attention is the fact that the "emperor" is actually never mentioned in *Pinch Runner*. Instead, the text repeatedly refers to the "Imperial *family*". When combined with the Japanese word for "emperor", *tennô*, the English word "family" (which is written in *katakana* characters) inevitably draws attention to itself. The first, obvious effect of this label, is that the centre of the power structure that the text outlines becomes no longer singular, but plural—not the monolotithic character of the Emperor, but the plurality and community of the "family". While it is clear that the imperial institution somehow lies at the "centre" of the power structure of the text, this centre is made deliberately vague and impossible to pin down to a singular point.

It is worth to notice that Ôe in the original uses the *English* word "family". The effect of juxtaposing this foreign word with the word *tennô,* which represents something so clearly central in Japanese culture, is obviously defamilarising. The term "tennô famirî" can be seen as a parodic representation of the more common Japanese term for the imperial household, the

tennô-ke. Ke is written with a *kanji* character that can be translated as "household", "house" or "family". The intrusion of the English language (which, in the postwar Japanese context, is the language of the U.S.) into the sphere of the imperial institution points to the fact that the position of this institution in the postwar period was intertwined with the interests of the U.S. occupation authorities. After the war, the role of the emperor was fundamentally reshaped. In order to protect him from being indicted in the Tokyo war trials, a new image of him was cultivated, as a democratic and peace-loving constitutional monarch.[32] This goal of reinventing the emperor was one that was shared by both the Higashikuni cabinet and the American occupational authorities. While his Japanese protectors obviously were concerned with preserving the continuity of the Japanese national polity (*kokutai*), the GHQ regarded the emperor as a useful influencial force in bringing about the radical reforms of Japanese society, which would align it with the U.S. as its closest ally in the far east. The American occupation authorities were interested in keeping the emperor in office in order to tap into the symbolic power he still held over his subjects. In a situation where the emperor risked facing the war tribunals, he, and those who supported him, chose to collaborate with the occupants. These were the circumstances that lead to the creation ofthe postwar, "democratic" emperor.

Already from the outset, then, the postwar imperial institution was a bastardised product of historical circumstances and political power struggles. The emperor became the focus of a political game in which the players sought to exploit his symbolic power for their own purposes. On one hand, he continued to function as the rallying point of ultranationalist elements in Japan, who still adhered to the prewar and wartime ideology. This we saw demonstrated not only in the Asanuma assasination incident, but also in the violent reactions to writers like Ôe and Fukazawa, who attacked the figure of the emperor in their fiction. However, the emperor was also used to protect the interests of the ruling elite in Japan—which were intertwined with those of the U.S. In June 1960, a visit by the American president was planned in Japan. This was at the time when the anti-Security Treaty demonstrations were at their most intense, and the Kishi government feared that president Eisenhower's visit would be compromised by left-wing activists. To avoid this, Kishi contacted none other than the above-mentioned Kodama Yoshio to help provide, as Chalmers Johnson puts it, "informal protection for the American president" (Johnson, 1986, p.13). According to Ôno (1981), this "informal protection" involved mobilising large numbers of members of violent ultra-rightist groups for an attack against the left-wing protesters. The bait to secure their cooperation was the emperor

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32 The following summary on the "democratisation" of the Shôwa emperor under U.S occupation rule is based on Bix, 2000, p. 533—579.

—if the American president came to Japan, the imperial couple would naturally meet him. If such a meeting was threatened by the protests of the left wing, it would not be difficult to mobilise these groups in a "defence" of their emperor. (Ôno, 1981, p.290) In the end, Eisenhower's visit was cancelled, but this episode clearly shows one of the ways in which the "imperial *family* energy" was used in the struggle for political interests in the postwar period. By replacing the *tennô-ke* with the *tennô famirî*, Ôe shows how even the "pure" Japanese institution of the imperial household was made part of the postwar history—which is to say the history of U.S.-Japan relationships. One of the characteristic features of *Pinch Runner*, is that it turns the focus from the "divine" person of the "emperor", to the institution of the "imperial *family*"—as a tool of a political power struggle.

By bringing focus on the "imperial *family*", Ôe also brings attention to the fact that the basis of the emperor system, is *not* the emperor, but the structure that he is part of. In contrast to the image of the transcendental, "pure" emperor of "Seventeen", *Pinch runner* focuses on the structure that surrounds him. Like all structures, the structure of the imperial institution rests on premises which can be shown to be arbitrary, artificial, created for the purpose of power. Therefore, in order to cut off uncomfortable questions of the legitimity of the imperial rule, these premises must be made to appear as so self-evident and natural that their ultimate arbitrariness is removed beyond the realm of questioning. In the case of monarchy, one of its key premises is the hierarchy of heredity. This is the idea that there exists not only a naturally given continuity between father and son, which entitles the son to step into the power of his father. Moreover, heredity presupposes a naturally given hierarchy between the two—the son is subordinated to the father, and the father holds responsibility and power over the son. This hierarchy, obviously, comes about because of the age difference between the two: the father is older than the son, has more experience, and therefore takes responsibility for the son's upbringing (ideally, at least). The father-son relation is by definition a hierarchical structure that is interwoven with our concept of time. As long as we consider time to be of an absolute and irreversible nature, the "natural" hierarchy of heredity will seem equally absolute and irreversible.

The claim to unbroken heritage guarantees the legitimity of the emperor as the central symbol of the Japanese people—as their symbolic "father". In the emperor-centered ideology of the prewar and wartime period, the relationship between ruler and subjects was often described as a metaphorical father-child relationship. The hierarchical order between the emperor and the

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people become in this way synonymical with the order of the family—which in turn means the indisputable order of nature. In 1994, Ôe held a lecture entitled "The ambiguity of the 'bonds of family'", where he points out how his childhood experience of the wartime ideological indoctrination affected his perception of the word "family" (*kazoku*):

> To me, family was connected to another, more horrifying image. I was a child during the war, and went to primary school under the old system [*kokumin gakkô*]. The principal was a hard-boiled kind of an old man. Every morning, at the morning ceremony, he would say ... "You are the children of the emperor. To fulfill your duty as his children, you must prepare yourselves for death." ... This is why I cannot stand it when someone speaks of society as a big family" (Ôe, 1994b, p.62).

In the wartime ideology, the emperor was clearly defined as the unifying point of the nation, around which the subjects were aligned. This position was legitimised by superimposing his image with that of the father. In other words, the authority of the emperor rests on the assumption that the position of "fatherhood" is an unquestionable source of authority. Unless the image of "family" evoked a sense of a natural hierarchy, the metaphor of the emperor as father would have no effect. His legitimity as ruler comes from the image of the father. When Ôe in *Pinch runner* refers to the "imperial *family*" and not to the emperor, it indicates that the symbolic power of the imperial institution depends on the premise that the "family" is a hierarchical institution.

   In this sense, *Pinch runner*, it is the first fictional text in which Ôe creates a model where the imperial institution is "not a fixed locus but a function", to borrow Derrida's term (1978, p.280). The emperor is the "centre" of the Japanese people only so far as he performs the "function" of being the metaphorical "father" of the people. The emperor system represents the "centre" of a hierarchical structure that is incompatible with the ideals of democracy. As such, its symbolic force is exploited by various figures, like "Big shot A", to bring people under their dominance. At the same time, the true source of this symbolic power lies not in the emperor system itself, but in the metaphor of family that gives the emperor his legitimacy as ruler. In order to subvert the hierarchical order that the emperor system represents, removing the political institutions that support it, is not enough—as we will see in the next chapter. A more fundamental form of change is necessary; a transformation that can relativise the hereditary order—synonymical with the order of nature itself—of the father-son relationship.

4. Revolution! The problem of overcoming

So far we have seen how *Pinch runner* concerns itself with hierarchical structures, and by extension, with the nature of discrimination and oppression. It is therefore interesting that the text also describes a reality which is dominated by the struggle of marginals against oppressive structures. No sooner have the Mori and Mori-father pair undergone their "conversion", before they find themselves in the middle of the political struggle of the revolutionary movement. Through its commitment to the principle of revolution, it represents what should, in principle, be an advocate of a change of the power structures that the text questions. Its struggle resembles that of the converted duo against the mighty "Big shot A", in that both represent the struggle of the weak against the strong. However, as Mori and Mori-father learn more about this movement, they discover that it is torn apart by internal conflict, between two factions that are seemingly as motivated for fighting each other as for their common fight against the authorities. Moreover, the atomic bombs they are building—to provide them with the ultimate means to realise their revolution—turn out to be financed by none other than the BSA, as part of his "human domination program". In this way, the revolutionary struggle of the two factions ends up reinforcing the structures they are opposing. While the concept of revolution may be said to lie close to the project of the text, then, the example of these revolutionary groups becomes the example of how it should *not* be carried out. Therefore, to understand the deconstructive project which the text undertakes (and which we will discuss in chapter 5), we need to look closer at this background, against which it is carried out.

The descriptions of the revolutionary parties, characterised by their inclination for violence against both external enemies and each other, is clearly a parodic portrait of the Japanese student movement. This movement, which was particularly active in the vigorous struggle to change the political and academical situation of Japan in the 1960's, became in part a strong advocate for a total transformation of society through revolution. However, as the decade came to its end, the movement began to use increasingly violent tactics, and its tendency towards violent factionalism became more and more conspicous. Alienating its allies and spreading fear among the population, the radical groups became more and more isolated. As certain elements within the movement began to use guerilla-style attacks against both official and civilian

targets, official pressure to suppress this sort of political unrest became increasingly strict. Combined with the results of the Japanese economic growth, this caused not only the radical groups, but the marxist movement as a whole to lose much of its former strengthby the middle of the 1970's.

In other words, *Pinch runner* was born at a junction in history where the real-world "revolutionary parties" (with their countless factions) all too clearly had outplayed their role as agents of change in Japanese society. Not only had they shown themselves unable to overturn the power structures they were up against; by the middle of the 70's it became clear that the conservative, pro-U.S. establishment that they had challenged with such vigour in the previous decade, was as securely in place as before—if not more so. growing even stronger than before. In this sense, *Pinch runner* is a response to the history of the defeat of the last (so far) great protest movement in Japan. To understand the project of the text and the background for the "nonsensical" event of the "conversion", we therefore need to look closer at this historical background.

The background of the student movement

As we proceed to look into the history of the student movement as background for *Pinch runner*, we need to consider how the text interacts with this history. Many of the historical references made in relation to the Revolutionary Party, point to specific and identifiable historical events and actors. Indeed, without knowledge of some of these incidents, many of the events in the text may appear so random and absurd that they seem irrelevant as political commentary altogether. However, we must also resist the temptation of becoming too detailed. If we were to trace a single, historical origin for the image of the factional conflict Revolutionary Party, we would be in for a hard time: from the early 1950's, the first parent body of the student movement, the Zengakuren, spawned more than thirty-two different factions, and just a single one of these, the Bund, produced fifty-four distinct sub-factions (Steinhoff, 1984, p.182). As a contemporary observer notices, on a note of resignation: "Trying to trace each student group through the period from 1962 to the end of 1969 is like unravelling a ball of tangled wool, in which the thread splits, breaks and sometimes gets knotted" (Harada, 1970,

p.99). Here, we will examine the warring factions of the revolutionary party in *Pinch runner* as a conglomerate image, consisting of references to different situations and actors found throughout different stages of the history of the student movement. The text, then, is not to be read as a criticism of specific episodes and groups in the movement. Rather, by evoking episodes from a wide specter of the movement's history, the text points to the structural problems that underly them. While much of the parody is specific, then, the criticism implied is general. It suggests that the student movement was not only a victim of unfortunate circumstances and strategic errors,but that its main problem was of a more fundamental nature.

So far we have, somewhat unprecisely, been speaking of the "student movement" as a phenomenon of the 1960's and 70's. While this was the period when the movement was at its most active, its history history is not limited to this period. The Zengakuren, the national association of self-governing student bodies was formed in 1948 ("Zengakuren", 1998). This organisation represented the mainstream of student activism during the anti-Security Treaty protests around 1960, and became the departing point for the majority of the student groups in the years that followed. When we choose to concentrate on the 1960's and 70's here, it is because the anti-Security Treaty protests marked the beginning of a new stage in the history of student movement in Japan. Beginning with this event, student activism became increasingly dominated by direct actions, and confrontations with the forces of authority. This change in the student movement coincides with the emergence of the so-called "New Left". While this label applies to a large number of groups and factions within the student movement, they had in common, as the name suggests, a sense of discontent against the policies of the "old" Left, specifically the Japanese Communist Party (hereafter JCP). While it was within the "New Left" that the most radical groups of the student movement saw their birth, the factionalist infighting that is parodied in *Pinch runner*, is a phenomenon which applies equally to the pro-JCP groups within the student movement. In the following, we will therefore include both the pro- and anti-JCP camps of the student movement in our overview, concentrating on the context of the 1960's and 1970's.

In *Pinch runner*, it is the issue of "revolution" that divides the two warring groups. One group positions itself as the mainstream "Revolutionar Party" (*kakumeitô-ha*), rejecting the other as "a group of counterrevolutionary thugs" (*hankakumeiteki na gorotsuki*-shûdan). In the history of the student movement, too, the issue of revolution—in particular, how it was to be carried out— became one of the great fault lines, dividing the movement in two camps; for or against the JCP. The JCP had a long history of conflicts with authority, suffering hard persecution under the

Peace Preservation Law of 1925 during the prewar and wartime period. In the years after the war, the party was legalised by the U.S. Occupation forces, and communist political prisoners were released[33]. During the first half of the occupation period, the JCP actively supported the democratic reforms of the GHQ. However, as the relationship between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. grew tenser, the occupation authorities' attitude toward the party grew colder. The JCP, on its side, responded by adopting the Cominform's anti-imperialist and revolutionary line, and dedicated itself to bringing about a "general uprising" of the masses (Koschmann, 1993, p.401). For a period, the JCP commited itself to bringing about an abrupt and total change of the postwar political system, if necessary by force.

However, before long, the JCP was to move away from this radical line and adopt a moderate policy. A turning point in this process was its sixth National Conference in 1955, where it announced its criticism of its previous tendency of "extreme leftist adventurism" (Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, 1981, p.8). With the JCP announcing its commitment to play "by the rules" of parliamentary democracy, a vacuum arose for the many who felt that more radical action was necessary to change the system. Adding to this was Krustchev's critique of Stalinism in 1956, which further deepened the identity crisis among Marxists in Japan (Koschmann, 1993, p.404). Soon there arose a number of new groups who were in opposition not only to the political authorities in Japan, but also to the JCP. In 1957, Kakukyôdô[34] was formed, followed the next year by the establishment of the Bund[35] (Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, 1981, p.8—9). This marks the beginning of the anti-JCP "New Left" branch of the student movement. However, the full consequences of the emergence of this rival force to the pro-JCP student activists, was not to become fully apparent until after the event which marks the "debut" of the 1960's strand of student activism in Japan—the anti-Security Treaty struggle in 1960.

The anti-Security Treaty protests

The anti-Security Treaty struggle (commonly known in Japanese as the *Ampo tôso*) refers to a series of protest against the renewal of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. While such events took

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33 In addition to the JCP, the Japanese Socialist Party also played an important part in the history of postwar marxism. As our focus here is not on the parliamentary parties on the left-wing, however, we will only outline the position of the JCP, for the purpose of clarifying the general split between pro- and anti-JCP factions in the student movement.

34 Short for Nihon Kakumeiteki Kyôsanshugisha Dômei, or "Japan Revolutionary Communist League".

35 The common name for Kyôsandô (short for Kyôsanshugisha Dômei, or "the Communist League").

place both in 1960 and 1970, we will here forcus on the 1960 anti-Security Treaty struggle, which was a turning point in the development of the radical student movement in Japan. This year, the original security treaty of 1951 was to be revised, tightening the cooperation between Japan and the U.S. on issues of security and foreign policy (Harada, 1970, p.81). It was advocated by the conservative LDP government headed by prime minister Kishi Nobusuke, a former vice minister under Tôjo Hideki's cabinet during the war (Dower, 1993, p.20). A revision would ensure continued U.S. military presence on Japanese soil, and the opposition feared that it would eventually lead to a rearmament of Japan[36]. For the opposition, it was not only the Security Treaty and Japan's relationship to the U.S. that was at stake: it was as much a struggle to protect "postwar democracy" and the pacifist constitution from reactionary forces (Koschmann, 1993, p.406). From January to June 1960, protesting groups conducted a number of actions to stop the treaty, ranging from occupying the Haneda airport lobby, through storming the prime minister's residence, to arranging mass demonstrations outside the Diet[37]. Spearheading these actions was the Zengakuren, which at the time was headed by the above-mentioned Bund. However, while the anti-JCP faction was in majority within the organisation, a large minority belonged to the pro-JCP Minsei faction[38] (about 40% in 1959 according to Harada, 1970, p.83). At this point, however, the joint cause of stopping the renewal of the treaty kept the organisation together for as long as the struggle lasted.

In the end, the actions of the Zengakuren and all the other protesters were to no avail. In spite of massive protests both among politicians and among the masses of protesting citizens[39], the Treaty was eventually forced through in the Diet. And while the strong opposition forced prime minister Kishi to step down, this incident showed for many Japanese all too clearly what the rules of the "democratic" political system of Japan were. Now, with the main uniting cause of the protest movement gone, internal tensions within the Zengakuren began to surface. The split between the pro-JCP and anti-JCP factions widened, causing the pro-JCP Minsei group to leave the movement (Harada, 1970, p.96). Also within the anti-JCP majority, internal conflicts grew tenser, and soon the group split into a number of smaller factions, leaving the Zengakuren crippled as an instrument of large-scale actions (Harada, 1970, p.94). To a large degree, the

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36 Dower notes that with the outbreak of the Korean War, the ocupation authorities left its previous course of demilitarisation, and started to apply pressure on Japan to rearm. When the Security Treaty was first ratified in 1951, the U.S. projected a Japanese military forces consisting of an army of 325,000 to 350,000—within 1954, "a figure larger than the Imperial Army on the eve of the Manchurian Incident in 1931" (1993, p.8).
37 Among these was the planned action to stopp president Eisenhower's visit to Japan, which we mentioned in Chapter 3.
38 Short for Minshu seinen, dômei, the Democratic Youth League.
39 In Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, the number is estimated to 170 000 at the most (1981, p.43).

splits were motivated by differences in each faction's assessment of the methods used and the results achieved in the anti-Security Treaty struggle. While all groups had the goal of transforming the remaining order in common, and—in broad terms—shared much of the same vision of how the new order ought to look, they were divided on the issue of how this transformation should be carried out. While they agreed that a revolution was needed, they were unable to agree on what *kind* of revolution.

What revolution? Against whom?

On one hand, 1960 had shown some of the strength of the New Left—particularly that of organising large-scale, direct action which forced both authorities and the greater public to give attention to their cause. At the same time, however, its greatest weakness soon became equally evident; the chronic tendency to internal quarreling and factionalism. While the student movement—both of the anti-JCP New Left and of the pro-JCP Minsei—continued to create wide disturbance in Japanese society throughout the 1960's and well into the 70's, it would never again reach the same level of coordination and public support. For the more radical groups within the movement, the failure of 1960 was the proof that more radical action was needed, adding to the appeal of an armed revolution (Koschmann, 1993, p.409). As the years passed and new issues of conflict arose, a marked increase in the use of violent means becomes visible. While this in itself increased the impact of the students' actions, it had the side effect of removing the focus from the *cause* they were fighting for, to the act of fighting in itself. Added to the fact that increasingly, student groups were seen fighting rival groups, rather than the authorities, it became less and less clear *what* precisely they are fighting for, and *who* exactly they were fighting against.

This sense of confusion is at least the feeling we get from the parodic portrait of the student movement in *Pinch runner*. Although we quickly are made aware of the factional conflict within the revolutionary party, the distinction between them is unclear[40]. Our viewpoint is

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40 In Wilson's translation, there is a tendency to over-emphasise the distinction between the "Revolutionary Party faction" on one hand, and the "counterrevolutionaries" on the other. In several places, the word *hantai-tôha,* "the opposing party" is translated as "counterrevs" (e.g. Ôe, 1994c, p.186—7 / Ôe, 1982b, p.304; Ôe, 1994c, p.188 / Ôe, 1982b, p.306; Ôe, 1994c p.190 / Ôe, 1982b, p.309). While we do find the term "counterrevolutionary faction" (*hankakumei-ha*) in the text, it is used to label the opponents of one faction, and is therefore not descriptive of the political orientation of the group.

aligned with that of Mori-father, who, in spite of his involvement with Ôno Sakuraô, is essentially an outsider to the movement, indifferent to its struggle until the time of the "conversion" of himself and Mori. As the half-ironic title of the chapter which opens the adventures of the newly "converted" pair suggests ("We immediately joined the struggle"), the two protagonists are suddenly thrown into the struggle of the two warring factions, without a clue of what is going on. Our first direct introduction to these groups come with an anonymous phone call to Mori-father, warning him to stay away from a planned anti-nuclear rally that day, on account of it being secretly organised by a "violent counterrevolutionary group" (Ôe, 1982b, p.128). Until this point, the text mentions neither the meeting nor the factional split within the movement, and in this way highlighting the sense of confusion which surrounds the conflict between the two groups. While Ôno's civil rights group participates in organising the meeting, Mori-father confesses his lack of knowledge (and, initially, interest) in the political orientation of this group:

> Until that point I had consciously avoided asking about who exactly the Ôno group was connected with, but during all the time that the Ôno group had been in activity, it wouldn't be unnatural if it had been subordinated to the leadership of the revolutionary faction. *Ok*, I thought at once, *I don't know what kind of political faction we're talking aobut here, but if someone out there is out to constrain Mori's and my freeedom, I'll turn up at that meeting, just to show them.* (Ôe, 1982b, p.128, original emphasis)

Until this point, Mori-father's involvement with Ôno's group has been motivated primarily (if not solely) by his sexual interest in Ôno, and party politics have been of no interest to him. As he receives the anonymous telephone call, however, the factional conflict becomes something that can "constrain" his and Mori's freedom. His decision to go to "join the struggle" is as much a struggle *against* the student activists as *with* them.

However, as the "converted" father-and-son pair joins the anti-nuclear meeting, the only thing which becomes clear about the anti-authorian struggle of the Revolutionary Party, is the state of confusion in which it is. From the beginning, the focus of the meeting is shifted off balance. On the stage, there is a banner with the words "NUCLEAR POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE POWERLESS!" (Ôe, 1982b, p.144). The irony is obvious; the protest against the development of nuclear energy becomes a call for nuclear armament of the masses. In he words of Mori-father: "Isn't it full of implications? This is a task which no government, east or west, has been able to realise." (Ôe, 1982b, p.144). We are also reminded that this slogan clearly resonates with Mori-father's argument of arming *our children* with nuclear weapons, discussed in chapter 2. In this sense, we could argue that Mori-father's first meeting with the politics of the revolutionary

activists, is positive—seemingly, they are commited to realising the project which he himself outlined at the parent-teacher meeting; to place the disempowered at the centre of attention, and give them the power to defend themselves.

Initially, this idea of a total transformation of power relations—a revolution—reverberates strongly with the character of Mori-father. However, no sooner has the meeting started before it deteriorates into the chaos of factionalist fighting. The banner is switched so it reads: "NUCLEAR POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE POWERLESS, BUT NOT IN THE HANDS OF YOU COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY THUGS!" (Ôe, 1982b, p.144) The next moment, members of the two factions clash together and the meeting turns into a free-for-all. Immediately, the problem inherent in the idea of the empowerment of the marginal becomes clear: Who are the "powerless" that should be empowered? Both factions claim to represent the disempowered, and both regard the other as a false representative. There exists no grey zones here. To each of the fighting factions, any definition of revolution that differs from its own, is "counterrevolutionary". This binary logic is also visible in Ôno's frequent use of the term "fascist" to label those who disagree with her. In the rhetoric of revolution there is no room for the co-existence of differences. Discrepancies of opinions are turned into factional divides.

Ironically, the division between the factions makes the political agenda less clear, if anything. In the text, the distinctions between the two factions are blurred, to the point where all that is clear about them is the fact that they oppose each other. All other characteristics drown in their chaotic infighting. In the chaos of the anti-nuclear meeting, revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries clash together, the rest of the crowd panics, and distinctions between friend and foe, participants and non-participants are lost. To add to the confusion, the lights go out and the meeting hall is lit only by a single, flashing strobe light:

> Of course, the guys who were slugging it out were members of the two revolutionary factions, young activists. Apart from them, many people were just running about, pushed out of the centre of the fights. But in a large-scale melee like this, how could you guarantee your safety, even as an outsider? Especially in the middle of the constant flashes of light and darkness. Before long, I was hit in the neck, and when I swung back I hit somebody on the nose. In the second of darkness that followed, I was afraid that someone would counterattack, but in the next flash of light I saw that the seat where the person I'd hit should be sitting, was empty. (Ôe, 1982b, p.148)

Separated from Mori in the confusion, Mori-father scrambles to the stage to rescue Ôno, and together they escape the hall, just as the riot police comes charging in to round up the activists. In this way, Mori-father's (and the reader's) first encounter with the revolutionary party ends with only one thing becoming clear; the state of confusion in which their struggle is.

To understand the historical background of these descriptions of a student movement in disarray, in which factions fight each other as vehemently as they fight the authorities, we must again turn to the history of the student movement. As the anti-Security Treaty struggle came to an end in the summer of 1960, the student movement, which at this time still was represented by the united Zengakuren, started splitting into factions. However, the sort of factional violence that the text parodies here, is a later development, which took place largely in the second half of the 1960's. It is the phenomenon of "uchigeba", a word that in the text appears in the newspaper headlines that describe the chaos at the anti-nuclear rally, for instance: "Factional violence [*uchigeba*] causes chaos at anti-nuclear meeting. Riot squad to the scene." (Ôe, 1982b, p.182). *Uchigeba* was a neologism that was used to refer to the violent infighting that became one of the characteristics of the student movement. *Uchi* refers to something which is "within", on the "inside" of a group, whereas *geba* is short for the german term *Gewalt,* which can be roughly translated as "force". "Geba" was a word rich in Marxist connotations, and was used to refer to the use of force to oppose authoritarian suppression. In this sense, the term is a contradiction in terms, and it therefore poignantly catches the irony of the development within the student movement.

Chûkaku and Kakumaru

Two factions that were notorious for the fierceness of their struggle against each other, were the Chûkaku and Kakumaru, which both sprang out of the anti-JCP organisation Kakukyôdô. According to Patricia Steinhoff, the first battle between these groups in 1964 represents the beginning of violent factionalism in the student movement (Steinhoff, 1984, p.182). This was also the first time student activists armed themselves with helmets and poles—equipment that was to become iconic of the student movement (Steinhoff, 1984, p.182). In the following years, these two groups continued to clash with each other. As the most prominent pair of rival factions within the student movement, it is obvious that the history of the Chûkaku and Kakumaru has had a strong impact on Ôe's description of the warring factions in *Pinch runner*. While the idea of a nuclear arms race between the two groups in the text represents a comic exaggeration of the conflict, the history of the Chûkaku and Kakumaru shows that both were committed to extreme methods, especially when the enemy was the opposite faction. The conflict between them escalated towards the end of the decade. A turning point was when a

Kakumaru member was lynched by a group a Chûkaku activists in August 1970[41] (Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, 1981, p.148). In an event that no doubt provided Ôe with inspiration for the scene discussed above, the leadership of Kakumaru announced the group's dedication to "eradicate" (*senmetsu*) the Chûkaku faction—at an anti-war rally (Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, 1981, p.148). We see that the irony of Ôe—as sharp as it may seem—is matched by that of real-world events. In response to this, Chûkaku denounced their rivals—in rhetoric similar to that used by the groups in our text—as an "armed counter-revolutionary group" (*busô han-kakumei shûdan*). When another Kakumaru member was lynched by Chûkaku members in 1971, the conflict intensified further, with both factions issuing "declarations of war" (*sensen fukoku*) against each other (Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, 1981, p.149). While none of the factions were involved in development of atomic bombs, it is clear that Ôe's parody of the student movement represents a relatively small exaggeration over the real-world "revolutionaries".

However, while the satirical descriptions of the two warring factions in *Pinch runner* reflect events from the history of Chûkaku and Kakumaru, the problem of factionalism was in no way limited to these two groups alone. In the latter half of the 1960's, inter-factional violence became increasingly characteristic of the student movement. The statistical material that Steinhoff cites, shows the extent of the phenomenon: "Between 1968 and 1975 there were 1,776 internal factional disputes which came to police attention because of their violence. They involved 4,848 injuries, 44 deaths, and 3,438 arrests" (Steinhoff, 1984, p.182). To this she concludes: "Even during the peak years of violence in student confrontations with university and civil authorities, more students were injured in internal disputes than in clashes with external enemies" (Steinhoff, 1984, p.182).

This development coincides with the intensification of the university struggles in Japan. Starting with a five-month strike at Waseda university in 1965—66, universities all over Japan were soon to turn into battlegrounds for the student activists' conflicts against university authorities and each other. At the most, more than 40% of the country's universities were affected by the strikes, and most of these were under occupation (Dower, 1993, p.21). Education was cancelled for long periods of time, and buildings on campus were occupied by activist groups of different denominations, fighting each other for territory, as we will see in the below example of the Tokyo university struggle. The struggle against authorities and the

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41 We also find references to lynchings such as this one in the text: "Your party's secret fighting group ... tracks down its opponents, trails them, corners them and murders them, with the information from its own network and with its own code of conduct." (Ôe, 1982b, p.304)

struggle against rival groups developed at the same time, and the factional violence is therefore a phenomenon that is inseperable from the external struggle against authorities.

The Tokyo University Struggle

The chaotic situation of the student movement becomes clear when we look at what is perhaps the most iconic of the university struggles in Japan, the Tokyo University struggle of 1968—69. This conflict, which began as a protest against department policy in the Medical Department in 1967, started to snowball with a rapid pace until the conflict soon engulfed the entire university[42]. During the first stages of the conflict, the protests were clearly directed against the university authorities' handling of the initial Medical Department conflict. However, as the conflict escalated, the focus of the struggle shifted to bringing about a total change of the university. A turning point in this development was when a Zenkyôtô[43] group was formed at the university in 1968. This was a joint-cause ad-hoc alliance of various—though mainly anti-JCP—left-wing groups, along with so-called "non-sect" students, who joined the struggle against the university authorities without aligning themselves with a specific, political group. This represented not only a broad mobilisation of the forces fighting the university authorities; but with the emergence of Zenkyôtô, the struggle was further radicalised.

However, the political differences between different participants soon came to the forefront the foreground. This alliance, with its many anti-JCP members, soon came at odds with the large pro-JCP Minsei group of the Zengakuren. In the first clash between them, more than 2 000 students fought against each other, leading to the injury of more than 70. And as the conflict with university authorities tensened—and ultimately lead to the authorisation of using the Riot police to bring the situation under control—so did the internal conflicts. The following description of the situation in the Komaba campus in the days before the conflict was put down, is illustrative.

> Komaba was now a divided camp with makeshift barricades thrown up across the central avenue. At one end were the Minsei who controlled the three dormitories and who sat patiently in columns wearing yellow helmets and holding long woodens sticks behind the buildings, in case any trouble should break out. On the other side were the Zenkyoto, who feverishly barricaded first this building

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42 The information on the Tokyo University struggle in the following passages is based on Sawara, 1970.
43 Short for Zengaku Kyôtô Kaigi, or "All-campus Joint Struggle Council".

and then the next, hauling desks across the road, fixing bookcases and chairs along the roof edges, breaking up concrete paving stones to provide ammunition. Loudspeakers brayed out fiery rhetoric from both sides. Broken enemy helmets were displayed, stuck on the end of poles pushed out of windows, trophies of the fights (Sawara, 1970, p.153).

As Sawara notes, this chaotic situation had very little to do with the university conflict, "but was made possible by the anarchic situation prevailing on the campus" (Sawara, 1970, p.150). Unable to unite to fight the common enemy, the student groups fought each other with increasing ferocity. Also within the Zenkyôtô, tensions mounted and led to conflicts between different factions, with the Kakumaru and the Hantei Gakuhyo factions involved in repeated clashes. The situation was chaotic, and even groups who were ostensibly on the same side in one factional dispute, started fighting among themselves.

   In the end, the failure of the different groups to find common ground, set the stage for its defeat. While the internal conflicts in the student movement clearly made it less of a direct threat to authorities, it did undoubtedly provide reason for taking more drastic action against the students. On January 18th, an 8500-man strong police force launched an offensive against the Zenkyôtô students, who had barricaded themselves in the Yasuda Hall, an iconic landmark of Tokyo University. After two days of bitter fighting—the police armed with tear gas, water cannons, a helicopter and duralumin shields, the students with "just about everything they could lay their hands on—iron pipes, wooden poles, stones, hatchets, rivetguns, gasoline, poison, explosives, and even a primitive homemade flame-thrower"—the students were routed. Along with the Nihon University (Nichidai) struggle, the Tokyo University struggle represented the peak of the university struggle, and was given massive media coverage all over Japan (Sawara, 1970, p.158). It therefore stands as a symbolic event, both of the massive force and scale of the student movement, its ability to capture the attention of the society, but also, inevitably, of its failure.

From the above episodes it should be clear that neither the Chûkaku – Kakumaru conflict, nor the chaotic struggle at Tokyo University, represented isolated epsiodes that could be explained away simply as the results of unfortunate circumstances or tactical errors. The widespread occurences of factional violence and infighting indicates that this tendency was a structural problem of the student movement. Patricia Steinhoff explains this phenomena as a logical result of the organisational model which was used by the groups of the movement, called "democratic

centralism"[44]. In this model, which was adopted from the international communist movement, the group is divided into clear, hierarchical levels, with a decision-making body on each level electing members to the next level. This model was refined by Zengakuren, and had long been used at the grass-root level by the self-governing student bodies (*jichikai*) at universities all over Japan. Even the Zenkyôtô movement, which originally espoused a more horizontal form of organisation, eventually came to largely adopt this model. As it was practiced, the student groups were characterised by having a large numbers of grass-root members with only a loose sense of commitment to the group at the bottom, while most of the actual decisions were taken in small, higher-level committees. In these committees, each member was elected on the basis of their constituency in the lower levels. In effect, this meant that when individual committee members clashed in the higher organs, each had behind him a power base which could form the basis of a new faction, if policy conflicts were not resolved. As Steinhoff notes: "Because of democratic centralist principles of decision making, those at the bottom are not free to take sides in such debates as they choose; their position is committed in advance by the actions of their delegates" (Steinhoff, 1984, p.179—180). Against this background, the factionalism within the student movement can be seen as a result of a closed, vertical organisational model, in which the members at the lower levels were used as instruments in the power struggle among the elite members of the group. The structure of the activist groups simplified the process through which conflicts developed into splits.

The closed, hierarchical structure of the student movement also becomes the object of Ôe's parodic treatment in *Pinch runner*. The text describes a closed, vertical structure of the organisation, in which members at each level blindly follow the orders of those above them. While Ôno Sakuraô is the leader of a group affiliated with the movement, it turns out that she has no knowledge of the political strategies of the Party. As it becomes clear to her that the movement is receiving funds from "Patron" in order to build their atomic bomb, she arranges a meeting with a party functionary of the movement to hear the party's stance. She complains to the functionary: "I've called the headquarters over and over, but they wouldn't talk to me. Wouldn't you call this fascist tactics?" (Ôe, 1982b, p.266) The functionary replies: "If you call us as fascists, you'll get into trouble. To give you our [the faction's] view of your individual case, your civil rights movement is under the leadership and guidance of our party's situational analysis. Still, it seems you've deviated from our main line time and again through your appeareances in the mass media. Not that I watch television myself, though. How about you let

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44 This overview of democratic centralism is based on Steinhoff, 1984, p.178—183.

us help you do some self-criticism?" (Ôe, 1982b, p.266). The words of the functionary suggests an organisation in which members on the lower levels are expected to follow the lead of the higher functionaries. Refusing to address Ôno's critical question, he suggests that it is her critical attitude that needs reform, not the party's strategies. "Self-criticism" (*jiko-hihan*) refers a common practice in the student movement, where the individual repudiates past actions, and declares its acceptance of the correct view of the group, along with submission to the authority representing it (Steinhoff, 1984, p.181). Steinhoff identifies this practice as an important part of conflict management in the student movement, adding that "It may be undertaken voluntarily, or it may be coerced by some authority" (Steinhoff, 1984, p.181). The party functionary's suggestion to Ôno represents not only a threat, it suggests an organisation in which differences cannot coexist. They must be resolved, either by pressuring the deviant individual to return to the "correct" line, or by pushing the deviant individual out of the organisation. In the latter case, if the individual has a sufficient power base, he can form a new faction. The phenomena of factionalism and suppression of dissent can therefore both be seen as results of the drive to create unity within the organisation.

"The essence of true revolution"

As we see, the problem represented by the warring groups in the text can be seen as a structural one. Factional violence becomes not only a deviation from the course towards revolution, the two phenomena are shown as inseparably related. At a meeting of one of the factions, held to commemorate the near-assassination of "Big shot A", the "converted" Mori-and-father pair gets the chance to address the grassroot members of the group. From the stage, Mori-father "broadcasts" the telepathic messages which the silent Mori transmits through their clasped hands, to the audience. In an "analysis" of the future, they disclose the grand scheme of the near-almighty "Big shot A" to the unbelieving students. In this process, Mori-father conveys the following, poignant message by Mori to the students:

> You must fight! Kill each other! With what, from a cosmic viewpoint, are the ultimately humane
> weapons: the club, the metal pipe, and the crowbar! Factional violence is a symbolic act through which
> yours and the opposing party express the essence of true revolution. As you move closer to the phase
> of true revolution, you will be even more thorough in killing each other! For after you've killed your

parents, you'll have no choice but to kill your brothers. Since the brothers must kill each other once they've killed their parents, wouldn't it be more efficient if you reversed the order and killed your brothers first? From a cosmic viewpoint, it's perfectly obvious (Ôe, 1982b, p.299).

Factional violence as an expression of the "essence of true revolution"—this may at first seem an absurd statement.The aim of revolution, as we commonly perceive it, is to overthrow the prevailing order, not fighting amongst the ranks of the revolutionaries. Or, in the rhetoric of Mori—the purpose is to kill the father, not the brother. However, according to the analysis of Mori-and-father, killing the father and taking his place is an act which sooner or later will necessitate killing the brother. In the course of a revolution, once a revolutionary group has succeeded in overthrowing the authorities, they take over the authoritarian role, thereby becoming potential targets for the next revolution. As a move to avoid this, the conclusion in Mori-through-father's argument to "reverse the order and kill your brothers first" becomes perfectly logical for all its absurdity. The fight against the authorities is essentially no different from the fight against allies: **"What, fratricide is different from the extermination war against counterrevolutionary thugs?"** Mori-father throws back at the activists. "Killing your brother is different from killing your enemies, you say? How are they different?" (Ôe, 1982b, p.299, original emphasis). In both cases, it is a power struggle where the strong dominates the weak. In this sense, the fight between different factions to prevail as the one, "true" revolutionary party, points to how these marginal communities internalise the hierarchy they are opposing. Even as they fight against causes of inequality, they simultaneously struggle to replicate the same unequal structures among themselves.

In Mori-and-father's "analysis of the future", the "revolutionary" struggle of the warring factions must—by necessity—end in the factional bloodbath of continuous *uchigeba*. And as the warring factions kill and maim each other, the only party who benefits from their "revolution", are the authorities which they oppose. This is pointed out by "Righteous man" in an earlier scene:

> All "Big shot A" needs, is to bring into this social situation some form of superenergy like that of an atomic bomb, in a form that he can manipulate. One bomb is good, two would be even better. The supertension that it would create, would turn society on its head, and suck it all into the hole! Like a huge tornado, it would suck it all up with a roar and lift the imperial *family* even higher, to absolute heights! The young revolutionary activists are all sure that they'll outwit "Big shot A" at the last moment. But it won't go that way. If you look at cultural history, you'll know it'll never work!" (Ôe, 1982b, p.259)

For the activists, the atomic bomb represents the means to carry out their anti-authoritarian

revolution. By obtaining a power equal to that of the superpowers (and far surpassing that of the Japanese authorities), they aim to fight authority with its own weapons. However, as "Righteous man"'s argument implies, the "superenergy" of the atomic bomb is so great, that the social instability that they would create, would be beyond the control of the students. In fact, his words suggest that the social flux that would follow a nuclear blackmail situation, is beyond *any* control. However, in the turbulent situation that would arise, he predicts that the social motion energy would gravitate in the direction of the symbolic centre of the Japanese society, the imperial *family*. Therefore, the power of the atomic bomb, immense as it may be, cannot become the tool for subverting the existing system. "Big shot A" does not represent a threat because he has the power to control the situation, but because he knows how to use the gravitational force of the imperial institution for his own purposes. The activists, on the other hand, end up as pawns in his plan. In this way, the text suggests that a revolution based on the weapons and principles of the order it opposes, will inevitably end up reinforcing that same order.

The means for the task: Internalising power structures

In order to better understand Ôe's pessimistic view on the notion of revolution, we need to look closer at the development of the historical student movement in the years after 1969. With the violent end of the university struggles at Tokyo University and Nihon University as a turning point, it became increasingly clear to the activists that the anti-authoritarian struggle could not be successful in the way it had been fought up to that point. Faced with the superior force of the riot police, the activists could not hope of winning an open battle with the crude weapons they had to their disposal. At one university after another, barricades were torn down, and the situation brought under control by the university authorities. Many students withdrew from radical activities as the pressure increased both from authorities and from the rest of society; 1969 was also the year when Japanese corporations began to exclude ex-student activists in their recruitment (Steinhoff, 1984, p.176). In this way, it gradually became clear that the student activists, through their violent protests had accomplished only to reinforce the hold of the authorities they had opposed[45].

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45 An important factor in the apparent decline of the protest movement in Japan in the 1970's is the economic

However, while the university struggles had passed its peak, a small fraction of the activists persisted. In September 1969, the Red Army Faction of the Kyôsandô was formed, an event which marked the birth of a new strand of armed anti-authoritarianism in Japan. Along with another group, the Keihin Ampo Kyôtô, the Sekigun-ha quickly developed a new style of decisive and extremely violent militant struggle. Starting out as a mass movement promoting radical versions of the large-scale actions of the Zenkyôtô, they soon became small and tightly knit guerilla-style groups. The Sekigun-ha soon gained a reputation; they were the first group to use firearms in political struggle in Japan, and were responsible for Japan's first airline hijacking incident in 1970 (Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, 1981, p.144). Their targets also included police boxes and U.S.military camps. In July 1971, the Sekigun-ha and Keihin Ampo Kyôtô merged, and took the name Rengô Sekigun[46] (Takazawa, Takagi and Kurata, 1981, p.154). Obviously, groups like these may be considered borderline cases of what can be defined a "student" group. In any case, they did not represent the mainstream of student activism in this period. However, these groups grew out of existing bodies of student activist groups, partially as a response of the crackdown on student activity in the late 60's. Their vision was a continuation of that of their radical predecessor groups in the student movement. Their turn to extremism can therefore be seen as a development of their predecessor's strategies in order to realise the same goal. In order to fight the authorities more effectively, they used the weapons of the authorities—not atomic weapons, but guns and explosives—against them.

However, in spite of these "achievements", what the Sekigun group is primarily remembered for, is the events which led not only to the demise of this group in Japan, but which also made them largely responsible for discrediting the entire New Left, and provided the conservative government with effective reason for further increasing its pressure to silence dissent in Japan. In February 1972, the Japanese public were shocked by the news that a group of five members of the Rengô Sekigun had barricated themselves in a mountain cottage in Karuizawa, Gunma Prefecture. Taking the caretaker's wife as hostage, the five activists held up in the cottage for nine days, surrounded by a large force of police men. Press coverage was massive, and when the police launched its final assault on the cottage, television channels provided live coverage

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growth, which in spite of a temporary slump in the 1970's continued to improve the private economy of Japanese citizens. John Dower summarises the situation in the following way: "Japan had become a prosperous superstate by mobilizing its population and resources resolutely behind productivity and economic nationalism, and its accomplishments drew understandable admiration and envy from throughout the world. The line between mobilization and regimentation is a fine one, however, and the Japanese state of the 1970s and 1980s also appeared to many observers, especially abroad, to have stepped over that line" (1993, p.31).

46 "The United Red Army"

from the scene. Eventually, after two policemen and one civilian had been killed, the activists were arrested and the hostage released. After the Asama cottage incident, it was discovered that during the previous two-month period, almost half of the original group—twelve members, altogether—had been killed by the other group members in an in-group purge[47] (Steinhoff, 1989, p.734).

The events that took place at Asama cottage also exerted a strong influence on Ôe, who at the time was in the middle of writing *The floodwaters have come unto my soul* (hereafter *The floodwaters*). In an essay from 1974, he writes that he originally had received inspiration for the novel from a story he had heard on a trip to the Soviet Union about a group of juvenile delinquents who robbed army officers for money to buy jazz records (Ôe, 1974a, p.144—145). However, as he saw the scenes from Karuizawa unfold on his television screen, he writes that it was as if what he was writing was happening in real life. While considering to abandon the story, he chose eventually to finish it. Although it is interesting to notice that *The floodwaters* seems to represent a far more positive evaluation on this part of history from *Pinch runner*, Ôe himself criticises the story in a later essay as unsuccessful in converting the incident into fiction (Ôe, 1984a, p.65). To achieve its purpose, Ôe writes, the text would need to be "lifted to a higher level" that could "transcend the level of the revolutionary movement" (Ôe, 1984a, p.65). Possibly, the fact that the incident took place as he was writing made it impossible to get the distance to the material necessary to transform it into a satisfactory fictional form—although this obviously amounts to speculation.

What is clear, is that at the time of writing *Pinch runner*, the long-term effects of the Rengô Sekigun's guerilla activities were becoming clear. The Asama cottage incident and the preceding purge had left a great impact on the Japanese public, and became another turning point in the history of postwar left-wing activism in Japan. Not only did they discredit this particular kind of extremist, guerilla-style activism, they became a factor in further weakening the support for the left-wing protest movement. Obviously, there were other events that also should be mentioned: Around this time, the atrocities of the Chinese Cultural Revolution became known, and with the armistice in Vietnam in 1973, "the last great cause that had provided a modicum of common purpose among the opposition was removed," Dower notes. (1993, p.27). However, it seems

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47 Steinhoff makes the following summary of the incident: "While trying to merge the two ideologically and organizationally dissimilar groups [Sekigun-ha and Keihin Ampo Tôsô] into a United Red Army (*Rengô Sekigun*), they experimented with a form of encounter group as a way of toughening up the least experienced members. The situation escalated into violence and physical trials as a means of helping people overcome their weaknesses and soon turned into an uncontrollable purge." (1989, p.734) This incident may also have inspired the idea of "revolution as fratricide" in *Pinch runner*.

likely that the Rengô Sekigun played an important part in strengthening the aversion of the Japanese public against extremist activism. In this way, they fill a function much like the revolutionary parties in *Pinch runner*, in that their revolutionary efforts worked against its purpose, and strengthened the atmosphere of conformity in the Japanese society.

Obviously, the protest movement did not disappear altogether; as Japan rose to economic power during the 1970's, there was an increase in the activities of civil protest movements in reaction to, in Dower's terms, "almost catatonic fixation of the ruling groups on industrial productivity and economic nationalism" (Dower, 1993, p.6). However, these groups concentrated mainly on specific issues, avoiding the doctrinaire ideologies that had dominated the left wing (Dower, 1993, p.6). This shows how the student movement, and the groups it had spawned, had outplayed its role, and that the vision of a total transformation of society through revolution, increasingly lost ground. And on the popular level, Dower notes, "the average citizen turned inward, to bask Japan's new international influence as an economic power and became consumed by material pursuits, exemplified in such mass-media slogans as 'My Home-ism' and 'My Car-ism'" (Dower, 1993, p.27). And as the Lockheed scandal had shown, behind this economic growth lay the powerful real-world "big shots", competent in manipulating the energies of society to their own advantage. More than ever, it seemed, Japan was in need of a transformation that could turn the principles of democracy into something more than a facade for the corrupt and reactionary power structures that dominated the country.

However, with the collapse of the student movement and the demise of the Rengô Sekigun, it had become all too clear that the "revolution" they had advocated, could not become the medium of this change. At this junction in history, *Pinch runner* represents an attempt to probe for an alternative form of change that could oppose the "human domination program" of real-world "big shots", and deflect the gravitational pull of the imperial institution. The example of the student movement had shown that such a change could not be brought about as a struggle of one group ("peripheral") against another ("authorities"). As the text suggests, this form of binary struggle only served to reinforce the binary logic of hierarchy that it was supposed to fight against. What was needed instead, was a form of change that could subvert the foundations of hierarchies—a change that could transform the categories of "centre" and "margins" themselves into something relative. In short, what the world was in need of, was a "conversion".

5. "Converting" the problem: Towards political imagination

So far we have examined how power structures are represented in *Pinch runner*. On one hand we have the peripheral existence of Mori and *our children,* constantly threatened by discrimination and oppression. On the other hand, the "centre" represented by "Big shot" and the symbolic force field of the imperial institution. The project of *Pinch runner* is to seek a way to resist these power structures. However, as we have seen in chapter 4, the text rejects the idea of a "revolution", where the centre and periphery are simply interchanged, while leaving the basic structures unchanged. Instead the text suggests a different form of change; one that does not switch the positions of centre and periphery, but relativises their significance. This change is the mysterious event that is referred to as the "conversion".

The "conversion", which takes place to Mori and Mori-father, is an event that seemingly belongs to the private sphere. Yet, as the "converted" pair embarks on their mission, it becomes evident that their transformation has a significance that reaches far further. Their "conversion" is at the same time a "conversion" of the power structures that we have examined in chapters 2 and 3. In this chapter we will therefore look closer at different aspects of this phenomenon.

Nuclear conversion: The order of plutonium

What does the "conversion" signify? How can the absurd event of a 38-year old former nuclear engineer becoming 20 years younger and his 8-year old disabled son correspondingly older in the course of a night, be read as an political and subversive act of the imagination? To answer these questions, a good place to begin is by examining the word which is used to name this event. In the original text, the word used for what we have referred to as "conversion" is *tenkan.* The most common meaning of this word is "change", "change of direction", or "switch". It can be used to indicate a change of mind or of policy, or refer to a transition from one state to another. In the compound form of *tenkan-ten,* it refers to a "turning point", for instance in a person's career, or in history. While the word "conversion" implies the transformation of

existing matter, the word *tenkan* can also be used to refer to a complete "switch", as in a sudden change of mind.

In Michiko Wilson's translation, this term has been translated as "switch-over". Obviously, there are good arguments to support her choice. The transformation that happens to Mori and Mori-father clearly has element of a swap of roles to it. The process they undergo, is symmetric; both change age by 20 years. It is also a swap of their relative positions—the father becomes younger than the son, and vice versa. When they go out in public afterwards, Mori is the one who commands the most respect out of the two. On a more political level, this also implies a fundamental "switch-over" of high and low, "centre" and "periphery", ruler and subjects.

However, as we have seen in chapter 4, it is problematic to read *Pinch runner* as a text that advocates a simple exchange of a diametrically opposed "centre" and "periphery". The lesson of the revolutionary parties seems to teach us this. The phenomenon of the *tenkan* should therefore not be read as a metaphor for reversing hierarchical structures. Mori and Mori-father's transformation may be symmetrical, but it is not a "switch-over". They swap roles, but they do not exchange identities. They are transformed, but not into each other. What each of them become after the *tenkan*, is partly continuous with what he was before, partly related to what the other was before and at the same time something that is altogether different. To examine this paradoxical aspect of the *tenkan*, we will need to look closer at a usage of this word that we have not yet discussed; *tenkan* as nuclear conversion.

While *tenkan* is a wide term with a range of different connotations, there is in particular one usage of the word that the text draws attention to, and which covers the paradoxical aspect of the phenomenon it describes. Since Mori-father is presented to us as former nuclear engineer, it is natural that we consider this context for this term that it choses to describe the transformation of himself and Mori. In the nuclear industry, *tenkan* is a technical term that is used to describe the prosess through which plutonium is created. In one of his comments to Mori-father's narrative, Hikari-father explains:

> At a nuclear plant, steam boilers are heated by rods of concentrated uranium in which the amount of
> the isotope uranium-235 relative to that of uranium-238 is heightened by 2—3%. However, this
> process converts [*tenkan*] part of the uranium-238, producing plutonium in the nuclear core. (Ôe,
> 1982b, p.84)[48]

48 Compare with Wilson's translation: "At a nuclear plant, the vast heat created by a radioactive element undergoing fission is used to convert water into high-pressure steam that drives a massive turbine generator. Rods of "enriched" uranium—uranium in a more concentrated and volatile form—serve as the fissionable fuel. But the very process of fission itself transforms the uranium atom into an even more volatile and radioactive element: plutonium." (Ôe, 1994c, p.51) Wilson omits the details of the process and effectively rewrites the passage. In her translation, it is therefore difficult to see the connection between the phenomenon

Tenkan, in other words, is a nuclear reaction that transforms one element into another. Through the prosess, uranium is converted into plutonium. The type of reactor often used for this prosess is in Japanese called *tenkan-ro*, in English a "conversion reactor". It is against this background that we have chosen to use the term "conversion" to refer to the *tenkan* of Mori and Mori-father.

This context indicates that what happens to Mori and Mori-father, should not be understood merely as a "swap" or a "switch-over"; the transformation they go through, is of a more fundamental nature. In the prosess of a nuclear conversion, one chemical element, uranium, undergoes a reaction that causes it to transform into an entirely different element, plutonium. In the same way, Mori and Mori-father's bodies undergo a change at the molecular level. Changing one's physical age is a prosess that implies a radical alteration of the body, down to the level of the individual cell. The physical proof of this is that Mori-father's radiation scars, caused by his exposure to plutonium, have been miraculously healed when he wakes up after the "conversion":

> The most symbolic meaning of my "conversion" is that the scars of the plutonium burns on my body had been wiped away. Don't you agree? As we speak, nuclear reactors are producing a matter, plutonium, which never before has existed on this planet, with a half-life of 24 000 years. At least, there's no way that it'll disappear before the human race. Symbolically, I'm superimposing my body, which had been renewed to a pre-radiated, 18-year-old state, onto the earth as it was before it was polluted by this material which is created by humans, but which humans cannot make disappear. (Ôe, 1982b, p.121)

As we read these lines, a certain paradox becomes clear: On one hand Mori-father's "conversion" is a process which in some way is analogue to the process of creating plutonium. However, at the same time, the disappearence of his radiation scar implies a reversal of that very process. As a metaphor for the transformation of Mori-and-father, the process of nuclear conversion is made self-contradictory and ambivalent. However, we can see this as a part of the text's strategy of relativising everything, including its own rhetoric. This also applies to the way Mori-father's "conversion" is described. In the above passage, it is portayed as a sort of reversal of time, through which Mori-father's body is returned to its "pre-radiated, 18-year-old state". Yet, in a later passage where the "converted" Mori-father looks at his own reflection in the mirror for the first time, he does not see the face that he actually had as an 18-year-old, but "the face I had wanted as my real face when I was eighteen years old." (Ôe, 1982b, p.129) The "conversion", then, does not only reverse the decaying prosess of his cells. His body has been transformed into a new shape, which, like plutonium, "never before has existed on this planet".

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of the *tenkan* and the nuclear conversion process.

The significance of this paradoxical nature of the "conversion" becomes evident when we consider the case of Mori. While he and his father experience the same "conversion", the nature of his transformation is qualitatively different from Mori-father's. Unlike Mori-father, Mori is changed to a physical age that he has not experienced before. When his father is changed from 38 to 18 years old, he is transformed into an age that he has already experienced. When he himself jumps from the age of 8 to 28, however, he becomes a Mori that until then had only existed as a hypothetical potential. It is therefore an analogous process to the nuclear conversion, a process which results in the creation of an element that cannot be created naturally. It soon becomes evident that the "new" Mori is fundamentally different from the "old". Whereas the eight-year-old Mori was dependent on Mori-father for all his physical needs, the "converted" Mori has gained the ability to take care of himself: When the eighteen-year-old Mori-father is gripped by the sudden fear that Mori has left the house "as a twenty-eight-year old man with the experience of an eight-year-old" (Ôe, 1982b, p.129), he finds him in the kitchen, cooking pasta for Mori-father and himself. The "conversion" has not only transformed the age of Mori's body, but also his abilities. He is no longer unilaterally dependant on his father, and his "conversion" therefore implies a liberation from the one-sidedly passive role of subordination that is the lot of *our children.*

"Converting" hierarchies

Does this mean that Mori, through the "conversion", has been cured of his disability? To this we must answer: We do not know. Although this is, arguably, the most obvious question of the reader, the text provides no decisive answer. On one hand, the "conversion" clearly affects the "disabled" qualities of the 8-year-old Mori. Along with the change of his body, a change of his mental capacities seems also to have taken place. Whereas the "old" Mori is not in control of his bodily functions, the "new" Mori is capable of taking care of his basic needs, and to act independently of Mori-father. At the same time it is evident that the "conversion" does not transform him into a "normal" individual. As 28-year-old, he stops speaking altogether, and we are therefore left without the means to confirm what he is thinking. Even assuming that Mori somehow has been given back full mental capacities, the fact that he does not use language means that he remains irreducibly different from what we consider a "normal" human being.

While the "conversion" represents a fundamental change of his nature, it is not a "switch-over" from the state of being disabled to that of being non-disabled. The "new" Mori has characteristis of both of these categories, but belongs to none of them. Through the "conversion", he has become an ambivalent being that transcends the gap between the two. This does not necessarily imply an annullment of the difference between the "normal" and the "deviant". Mori's transformation does not alter the fact that *our children* remain *our children*, inevitably different from *the children who are not our children*. However, it makes the significance of this difference less self-evident. Not only does the "conversion" relativise the category of "deviance", Mori's seemingly "non-disabled" traits blurs the category of "normality" as well. The fact that the text does not give a clear answer to whether the "new" Mori is disabled or not, suggests that in the "post-conversion" reality, this question is no longer relevant.

In this way it becomes evident that the significance of the "conversion" is not limited only to the two individuals that are directly affected by it. It represents a new order that changes the rules of the game, so to say. As Mori-father's words suggest, when man first created plutonium, he created a material that had previously not existed. Yet, with its half-life of 24 000 years, plutonium is destined to outlive mankind. Moreover, its highly radioactive nature of plutonium causes it to alter the order of living organisms by inducing cancer.[49] It is a material that is "created by humans, but which humans cannot make disappear." By converting uranium into plutonium, mankind had unwittingly introduced a new era, of which we still cannot guess the outcome. In the same way, Mori and Mori-father's "conversion" marks the beginning of a new order, where the power structures that we have examined in this study are turned around, relativised, and destabilised.

It may seem odd that Ôe chooses to superimpose a negative phenomenon like radioactive pollution on the image of Mori and Mori-father's "conversion". Does this not imply that this event has a harmful impact on its surroundings? This seems to be the conclusion of "Righteous man", who believes that the "conversion is a result of the disturbance of the natural order, products of an ongoing ecological crisis caused by the nuclear power industry:

> You know, I think that the hot coolants alone are screwing up the order of nature. Did you know, there's an astronomical amount of hot coolants which is being spilled? Of course you get 'conversions' when you screw up the order of nature like that (Ôe, 1982b, p.249)

The scenario of nuclear pollution causing permanent change to organisms, was realistic enough,

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49 In previous works, like *My tears*, Ôe uses cancer as a metaphor for the reversal of the natural order.

as the case of the Minamata disease had demonstrated[50]. The above passage seems to imply that Mori and Mori-father's change is a form of mutation caused by the development of nuclear power. The "conversion" could therefore be seen as a symbol—or a symptom—of the crisis of the nuclear age. Or, in the words of Mori-father:

> If we assume that "conversions" like this are happening on a global scale, wouldn't that mean a crisis for mankind? Still, as the inventor of the polio vaccine at the Salk institute in California reminds us, the Chinese word for "crisis" means "danger" plus "opportunity". I wonder if this indeterminate number of "conversions", including mine and Mori's, are beings (or phenomenons) that symbolise this crisis of mankind. (Ôe, 1982b, p.123)

The "conversion" is related to the idea of a crisis. It occurs at a time when the existing order is threatening its own existence. However, if we think of the "conversion" within the the context of the nuclear industry, we also see that it occurs as a *result* of the processes that cause the crisis as well: Plutonium is a side product of the nuclear fission that takes place in the reactors, and is initially a waste product that contaminates the environment—however, as Hikari-father comments in one of his asides, it can become the raw material for an explosive device (Ôe, 1982b, p.85—85). In the same way, Mori an Mori-father's "conversion" takes place as a result of an impending crisis, caused by "Big shot A"'s "human domination program". Through their transformation, the "danger" of this crisis is changed into an "opportunity". As aberrations of nature they represent the possibility of subverting those hierarchical power structures that masquerade as the "natural order".

As we discussed in chapter 3, the imperial institution constitutes the symbolic centre of power in *Pinch runner*. This authority—which is so embedded in the social structures that it becomes second "nature"—is derived from its claim to an unbroken bloodline back to the sun goddess Amaterasu. To disturb the order of heredity, would be to destabilise the premise for its power. The "conversion" is an event that confuses "natural" hierarchy between father and son. It is therefore a threat to the "natural" authority of the imperial institution, as we see from the following interchange between "Righteous man" and "Volunteer mediator":

– You're the opposite of nature! Against this, the imperial *family* can do nothing![51]

– I agree that "converted" Mori and Mori-father are the momentum for a total negation of the so-called natural order of domination, "Volunteer mediator" agreed. Still, I don't quite grasp the relationship

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50 In the 1950's, large numbers of children in the Minamata region in Kumamoto prefecture was born with severe physical deformities and mental deficiencies, caused by mercury spills from an industrial plant in the region. When the truth of this "disease" became publicly known, it caused shock waves in Japanese society, and became an important rallying point for the antipollution movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Harada, 2004; Dower, 1993, p.21).

51 This sentence is omitted in Wilson's translation.

between the imperial *family* and Mori-father that you are talking about.

– Try to think of a "conversion" happening in the eternally unbroken bloodline of the imperial *family,* will you? If that was to happen, there would really be nothing they could do!" (Ôe, 1982b, p.248)

The word used in the original for "eternally unbroken bloodline", is *bansei ikke*, literally "ten thousand (often used as a synonym for "endless" or "limitless") generations, one house". If a "conversion" was to take place in the imperial *family,* the eternal, unchanging order of "ten thousand" generation would suddenly be made provisional, random, and disturbing questions would arise: What does bloodline signify if the son is older than the father? As the "centre" of the structure, the symbolic power of the emperor lies in his being one—an undivided point that all else revolves around. But if the ages of father and son were "converted", who could claim the right to become this point? As we see, the act of imagining the "conversion", is subversive. Simply by envisioning such a mutation taking place in the imperial household, its source of power is relativised. In a wider sense, this may be the greatest significance of the "conversion" as a literary device: It activates the human faculty that, according to Ôe, has a power that transcends the limitations of reality.

Imagination

In an essay entitled "Towards an imagination of buffoonery and rebirth", written in the same year as *Pinch runner*, Ôe makes the following assessment of the situation of the Japanese people:

> We are forced to realise that, whether seen from a cosmic, global or Asian perspective, the home of us Japanese is indeed a *house on fire*[52]. And I am convinced that if we are going to find a momentum for rebirth, without running away from the scene, we need a new mental technique [*seishin no gijutsu*] that can bring about a fundamental change." (Ôe, 1976b, p.115, original emphasis).

Japan was in a state of crisis, he claimed, and its people in need of some "fundamental change". The Japanese word for "change" here, is *tenkan*—in other words the same word used in *Pinch runner* for Mori and Mori-father's "conversion". Ôe's concern over Japan's political situation was caused by two factors, which become clear when we read the essay "Rejecting false

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52 Ôe is alluding to the title of Dan Kazuo's novel, *Kataku no hito* (*The man of the burning house*). The title of the filmatised version of this story was translated into English as *House on fire.*

words"[53], which he wrote in the previous year. On one hand, Ôe expresses his concern for Japan's domestic and foreign policies. As the U.S.'s closest ally in the far east, the country had chosen to depend on the U.S.'s "nuclear umbrella" for the protection of its interests, alienating itself in the process from many of its neighboring countries, including China and North Korea. This came in addition to the Japanese was reluctance to accept full responsibility for its war crimes, and Ôe saw these policies as a major hinderance for the Japanese people to reconcile itself with the rest of Asia. He comments that this policy was legitimised vis-a-vis the Japanese public as the only viable option open to Japan. With slogans—or "false words", as Ôe puts it— like "Look reality in the eye" (*genjitsu o chokushi* seyo) (Ôe, 1975a, p.23), all other options were discarded as unrealistic. This points to the other factor which contributed to Ôe's concern; the lack of an alternative point of view in Japanese discursive space. As we saw in the previous chapter, factionalism and extremism had largely discredited the radical anti-authoritarian movement of the Left. Ôe's above statements reveals the political vacuum which left the Japanese public without a "realistic" alternative to the current order.

In both of these essays, "imagination" (*sôzôryoku*) is a key word. This is a term that started to appear frequently in Ôe's essays in the 1960's and 70's. He considered the imagination as the one of the most important weapons of the novelist, and a tool which could transform reality— not only fictional reality of his works, but also the political and historical reality in which he lives. In "Imagination as force"[54], also from 1976, he writes that through the imagination, human beings can transcend the restrictions imposed on them by society (Ôe, 1976a, p.70). The concern of the writer is to search for "a way to free ourselves from the predicament we are in, to survive" (Ôe, 1976a, p.78). To this, he adds: "As a writer and an engineer of the imagination [*sôzôryoku no gijutsusha*], I am, through my imagination, trying to find a force that can turn our predicament on its head" (Ôe, 1976a, p.79). The act of creating fiction that can transcend the limitations imposed by "reality", is a highly political task.

The idea of turning a crisis "on its head" (*gyakuten suru*) lies close to the idea of the "conversion" of *Pinch runner*. Through the "conversion" of Mori-and-father, Ôe transcends the restrictions of realism, and thereby the structures which keep the disabled child locked in a marginal position. By imagining a "conversion", Ôe creates a literary experiment in which he lets the ultimate outsider become not only the "centre of focus" in the story, but he lets him become significant as the "pinch runner of mankind". By reversing the ages of father and son, letting the "idiot" become saviour of humanity, the text turns upside-down the hierarchical

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53 *Nise no kotoba o kyohi suru,* cfr. Ôe, 1975.
54 *Chikara to shite no sôzôryoku,* cfr. Ôe, 1976a.

structures which are so embedded in society that they become second nature. However, the "conversion" cannot be understood as a simple reversal of high and low, centre and periphery. Rather, it is a literary act which serves to relativise such distinction. The text does not represent a utopic vision of a reality where inequality does not exist, rather it plays with the structures— that is, with our preconceived distinction between what is central and what is peripheral, between the important and the unimportant, between what is serious and what is ridiculous—to force us to reconsider reality as we conceive it from a different perspective. At a historical moment where the strategies of the existing anti-authoritarian movement had not only shown its ineffectiveness in overturning the existing power structures, but in effect become an instrument of the authorities, *Pinch runner* can be read as an attempt to probe—through imagination—an alternative method of resistance. Borrowing freely from Christa Wolf, we could say it probes for a "third alternative", which can show a way out of the deadlock of "the unfruitful antinomy of the pair of opposites" (quoted in Gibson, 1996, p.105—106). Rejecting the choice of belonging to *either* centre or periphery, it imagines a form of change that transcends both. Linda Hutcheon writes of postmodernist fiction that it

> does not move the marginal to the center. It does not invert the valuing of centers into that of peripheries and borders, as much as *use* that paradoxical doubled positioning to critique the inside from both the outside and the inside." (Hutcheon, 1988, p.69)

The scope of this study does not allow us to discuss to what degree *Pinch runner* could be characterised as a "postmodern" piece of writing. However, there should be sufficient reason to suggest that its goals and methods have much in common with those Hutcheon outlines here. The values it rejects have much in common with those rejected in postmodern writing; "autonomy, transcendence, certainity, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin" (Hutcheon, 1988, p.57). Rejecting these values, *Pinch runner* turns to excess, discontinuity and irrationality to create a vision of difference which is not only defined in opposition to the exisiting, but which potentially subverts and destabilises the foundations of authority - "from both the outside and the inside."

Conclusion

In this study, we have undertaken a multi-faceted study of Ôe's 1976 novel, *Pinch runner dossier*. While keeping focus on analysing how hierarchical power structures are represented in the text—and how they are deconstructed—we have discussed the text within the textual framework of Ôe's writing in the 1960's and 70's on one hand, and within the historical context of postwar Japanese history, on the other.

With *Pinch runner,* Ôe (temporarily) concluded the saga of the disabled son. Throughout a cycle of texts that started in 1964, Ôe explored the potential of this "different" human being to become meaningful to a world that clearly regards it as unwanted. There is a sense of a linear development in the scope of the texts he wrote of this character, from the private, existentialist approach of "Aghwee the sky monster" and *A personal matter,* to the global, or even "cosmic", perspective of *Pinch runner*. For each story that Ôe wrote of this character, he grows older, advancing from infancy to childhood, until he is eight years old by the time of *Pinch runner*. With each story, the interaction between the child and its surrounding becomes more complex, and gradually he becomes able of communication not only with his father, but also with other human beings.

However, with *Pinch runner*, there is a leap—a "conversion"—that tranforms his body by 20 years. In his new form, he disabled child transcends the private sphere of the father-son relationship, and becomes "pinch runner for mankind". While *Pinch runner* is a continuation of the saga of the disabled child, it also represents a break with previous works. With this text, Ôe actively placed this character within a wider geographical, political and historical context. In this, it is a text that defies and resists common sense and rationality. By forcing together seemingly unrelated issues, such as disabled children and nuclear politics, *Pinch runner* has become an act of resistance against the "rational", which inevitably, but imperceptibly marginalises the deviant. Through its seemingly careless juxtaposition of the important and the non-important, "central" and "peripheral", it reevaluates and relativises power structures from a peripheral perspective.

Historically, *Pinch runner* is the direct reaction to a cluster of events that took place mainly in the late 1960's and the 70's. While the point of departure in the text is the need for some sort of fundamental transformation, or a "revolution" that can change the power imbalance between "centre" and "periphery", the text implicitly criticises the approach of the two revolutionary

parties. In this sense, it criticises and parodies the historical revolutionary marxist movements that emerged around the time of anti-Security Treaty protests in 1960, and continued into the 1970's. *Pinch runner* was written at a time when it had become evident that the movement had run its course, and all that their attempts to bring about "revolution" had resulted in, was that the Japanese society shifted further in the conservative direction. Structural corruption, which again was brought to light with the Lockheed scandal, showed all too clearly the unegalitarian nature of the system that the Japanese lived under. The democratic institutions were a facade, whose primary function seemed to be to hide the real flow of power underneath—and they were not doing a very good job at it, either. The great change of 1945, what should have been Japan's "conversion" from an ultranationalist, militarist state to a peaceful democracy, had long since turned out to be but skin deep. In the political and financial world, *kuromaku* and corrupt politicians all attempted to subvert the democratic system to their advantage—many of them people who had a history within the wartime and prewar system. And at the true centre of the structure, the national symbol of the emperor was still in place. Its significance had been discussed, and its position in the democratic system disputed, but, Ôe continued to point out both in fiction and in essays that it remained the "centre" of Japanese society. *Pinch runner* represents a new stage in Ôe's criticism of the emperor system in that it places the emperor within a historical and political context. *Pinch runner* represents an attempt to destabilise the ideological foundations of this institutions, by making its position in the "centre" less self-evident. The emperor system is made part of the structure, and thereby becomes relativised.

In our textual analysis of *Pinch runner*, we have traced some of the key thematical and technical traits of Ôe's writing in the 1960's and 70's. Firstly, we have seen how some of his most prominent thematical concerns in this period—the disabled child and the criticism of the emperor system—converge in the novel *Pinch runner*. While Ôe had developed these themes in several previous texts, this was the first time he linked them together in his fictional writing. Secondly, *Pinch runner* represents a culmination of Ôe's technical experiments with the device of a "switch" or "conversion" of the positions of father and son.

These developments, thematical and technical, are clearly interconnected. In *Pinch runner*, the two, seemingly themes of the emperor system and the disabled child are presented as two sides of the same problem; the emperor symbolises the central force that aligns society in a hierarchical structure, and the disabled child represents the being who will always be consigned to the periphery, whether within themacrostructure of "society", or the microstructure of the

"family". In a lecture he held in 1994, Ôe discusses the ambivalent nature of the "family", as an institution that can support and upholds its members, but also act as a place of oppression (1994b). In this lecture, he speaks of the relationship between himself, as a father, and his own son, Hikari:

> I have tried to understand him; you could also say that I have tried to live side by side with him ... However, at some point I noticed that I had the position of the superior within the family. I have tried to portray my family life faithfully in my writing. But when I read my own texts, I cannot escape the feeling that the father-figure, which is myself, is the superior, and that he is the inferior. Since this inferor child is disabled, he has a very close relationship to the father. The father protects the child, and he does it with a feeling of joy, so he has no sensation that he is dominating him. He does not feel that the child is his subject, placed under his authority (Ôe, 1994b, p.80).

These words suggest, as we have pointed out in our discussion on *Pinch runner*, that the issue of hierarchical structures within the family is closely related to the issue of oppression and domination in society. It is interesting to note that the texts that Ôe self-critically refers to above, are *Rouse up, o young men of the new age* and *Letters to a nostalgic year*, both of which are published *after* he wrote *Pinch runner*. It is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss the significance of this in detail, but suffice to note that both *Rouse up* and *Letters* are written in a realistic and ordered style (although Ôe's sense for bizarre episodes is also visible here), that lies far from the uninhibited "nonsensicality" of *Pinch runner*.

What is certain, is that Ôe's attempt in *Pinch runner* to combine the theme of hierarchy in the family with that of hierarchy in society, must be seen in relation to the "nonsensical" device of the "conversion". Through this device, Ôe explored a way to suspend the laws of reality that would allow to turn around and transform the foundations for authority, both within the family, and in society. As the failed efforts of the "revolutionary parties" of the 1960's and 70's had shown, the attempts to eliminate the authorities had only reinforced their power. *Pinch runner* suggests that the "father" cannot be removed, nor eliminated. However, it points to the possibility of transforming the significance of his "fatherhood". The question is whether the writer—and the reader—has the imagination to envision a father that is not a tyrant.

The cover illustration to my edition of *Pinch runner* contains an image of the "Pinch runner pair"—two, almost identical, bizarre-looking creatures with triangular heads. The only difference between them is their size; one is about twice as big as the other. In the afterword, Ôe tells that when his son saw the illustration, he liked it very much. However, Ôe soon realised that Hikari interpreted the picture very differently from himself. Whereas Ôe thought of the large character as the father and the small one as the son, Hikari saw the large figure as himself,

and the small one as his father (Ôe, 1982a, p.410—411). This anecdote illustrates the central concerns of *Pinch runner*, which we have examined in this study: When we engage in the task of converting hierarchies, there is no better tutor than the little child, who through his marginality offers a unique viewpoint on what human relationships could become.

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Abstract

Ôe Kenzaburô (1935) is one of the most influential and significant Japanese writers of the postwar period. In 1994 he became the second from his country to receive the Nobel Literature Prize, an event which increased international interest for this prolific writer. However, there are few studies on his writings in English.

In this study, I have examined the fictional text *Pinch runner dossier* (translated in 1994 as *Pinch runner memorandum*), which Ôe wrote in 1976. As so much of Ôe's writing, it is a highly referential texts, which actively interacts both with Ôe's previous literary works (through parody, repetition of motifs, characters and events) and with contemporary political and historical context. In my analysis, I have examined *Pinch runner* against both of these backgrounds. Using this text as a starting point, I have traced two of the central literary themes in Ôe's writing in the 1960's and 70's—the disabled child and the criticism of the emperor system—and analysed how they converge in this text, to form one of Ôe's most ambitious projects.

I have approached this through with a two-step analysis: Firstly, an analysis of how power structures are represented, and secondly, an analysis of how they are resisted and deconstructed in the text. As theoretical background, I have used Linda Hutcheon's and Andrew Gibson's theories on postmodernist approaches to fiction. As the conclusion of my analysis, I examine the central textual device of *Pinch runner*, where Ôe switches the ages of the father-son pair that act as protagonists in this text. I have shown that through this event, which is referred to as the "conversion" ("switch-over" in Wilson's translation), Ôe has explored the possibility of subverting and transforming the power structures that appear in the text. He found a manner in which to combine the themes of the disabled child with the criticism of the emperor system, in a way that provides a new perspective on both problems.