

ARTWORKS, ASSEMBLAGE AND INTERACTIVITY ON TESHIMA

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ABSTRACT: The artworks exhibited on Teshima, an inland sea island in western Japan, generate *shima* through sensory experiences. In generating the *shima* as an assemblage, personhood and artistic objects interact as they are embedded in local livelihood. These artworks are activated as visitors are involved in various interactions taking place on the island. In this regard, sensory experiences assemble the artworks by being situated in the here-and-now of *shima*. Traditional structures of Shinto and Buddhism and pilgrimage routes overlap the artwork sites, generating an accidental polyphony of assembled artefacts and associations. By the same token, artworks decaying in the island's environment resonate with non-art objects, also intensifying the assemblage.

KEYWORDS: artworks, assemblage, shima, Teshima,

Introduction

Teshima is a 14.5 km island located in the Inland Sea of Japan (Figure 1). About 800 residents live on the island in four main communities. Regular ferries connect the island with mainland city centres such as Okayama and Takamatsu, as well as the neighbouring islands of Shodoshima and Naoshima (Figure 1).¹ After decades of legal dispute over an illegal toxic landfill site that operated between 1978-1990 (Takatsuki, 2002), tourism has become the main industry of the island, which has hosted the Setouchi Triennial since 2013 (Shu-Yeng Chung, 2018). As of March 2019, 18 permanent artworks are displayed.² The artworks on Teshima interact as an agency of sensory experience and memory that generates an assemblage of *shima* – of space as a cultural landscape (Suwa, 2007) – in a similar manner to how folk music and dance interact in an annual Shinto ritual that is performed on an island in Sai Village, Japan to territorialise it (Suwa, 2012). Since the artworks in Teshima are displayed all over the island, they collectively embed local livelihood events and practices within their assemblage. However, these artworks do not necessarily aim to represent island identity: *Les Archives du Cœur* (2010) by Christian Boltanski, for instance, is a collection of heartbeats around the world and his *Animitas: La Forêt des Murmures* (2016) takes inspiration from the Latin American *animita* tradition.³ Island memory and experience are

¹ It is unsure as to which ancient province Teshima and its surrounding islands belonged. Bizen (Okayama Prefecture today) and Sanuki (Kagawa Prefecture) alternately claimed the islands but their residents came from both provinces and their origins have been of relatively minor concern as they developed a distinct *shima* identity in the islands.

² Fieldwork for this article was conducted in March 2019.

³ *Animita* in Chilean Spanish means a shrine or temple for dead spirits, as they are commonly constructed on roadsides. *La Forêt des Murmures* is therefore a shrine, in a similar manner to the O-Daishi-sama pilgrim tradition and numerous other bodhisattvas and animistic beings.

generated by interaction between the artwork and audience. There is no island essence immanent in the works but rather interactions arising from their location. Sensory experiences and memories are embedded in the here-and-now of the island, which assembles artworks into a *shima*. In this regard, the artworks of Teshima interact with various elements of the island, such as forests, roads, shrines, and enact socio-cultural space with them.

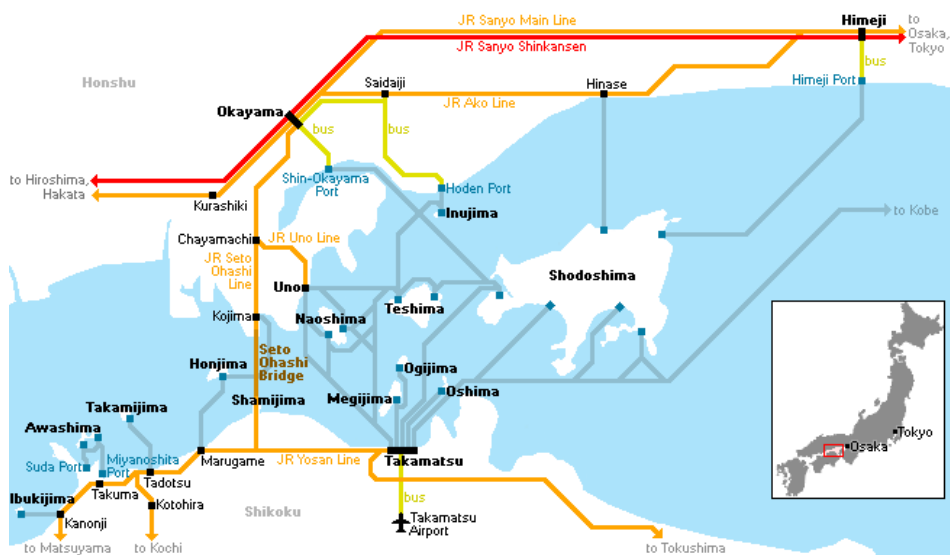


Figure 1 – The location of Teshima and network of access routes (Japan-guide com, nd).

This article discusses aspects of Teshima's located art as a generator of *shima* through various interactions. The discussions will be grouped into four sections but presented in non-paradigmatic order; this is because of the nature of *shima* assemblage as an interactive rhizome that stands for particularly non-hierarchical territoriality (Deleuze and Guattari, 1989; Hayward, 2012; Suwa, 2012). To borrow a musical term, the manner in which island experiences interact with the artworks can be described as *polyphonic*. While Bakhtin's sense of polyphony of plot in the novel genre is not implied here (if not totally irrelevant), promenades around Teshima's artworks can sometimes generate diachronic space, with fragments of different meanings overlapping with each other (Bakhtin, 1984). Here, *shima* shows a texture of polyphony in that a visitor can follow multiple lines of experience that are generated from various contexts as they are assembled by aural and visual experiences. Teshima's mountain and inland water are connected by a network that activates an animistic belief system through the enshrinement of natural phenomena and objects. The artworks placed near sacred spots accrue meanings that draw on a traditional imagination. Various kinds of sound on the island also create associative assemblages of artworks and non-artworks. Indeed, the distinction of artworks and other artefacts tends to become blurry with the decay of artworks and the ambiguity of separation between art spaces and everyday life. Lastly, the routes between artwork sites and traditional pilgrimage paths (Figure 2) overlap with each other in animating the assemblage of *shima* (Suwa, 2018).

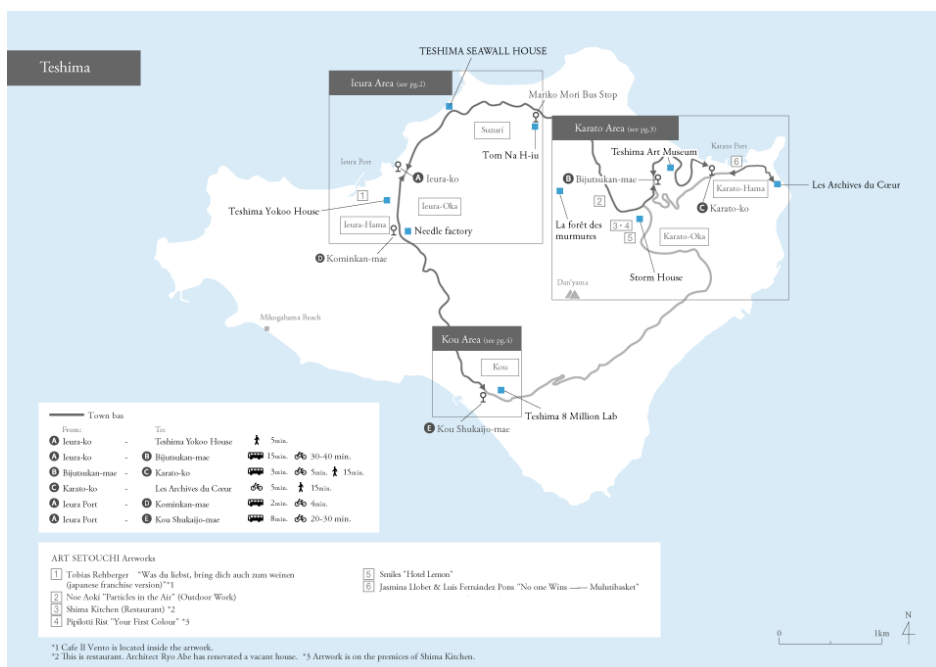


Figure 2 - Road network and artwork sites on Teshima (Chichu Museum, nd).

I. Mountain and Water: Animistic Grounds

The shell concrete building of Ryue Nishizawa's Teshima Art Museum, which opened in 2010, houses no individual artworks; rather, the entire space is a work of art. Raindrops and underground water coming out of pinholes on the floor are part of the artwork. Visitors keep quiet to listen to the sound of wind blowing and the rain beating on the floor as the open space resonates. Some squat or sit on the floor to gaze at the pinholes silently emanating underground water drops, which soon start wandering across the smooth surface. Others stand still to see the rain falling on the ground. The visitors' silhouettes, breaths and heartbeats become ephemeral works of art themselves. This aesthetic experience at Teshima Art Museum parallels the sensibility of traditional worship, since hearing the sound of wind and waterfall in the temples and shrines evokes an animistic experience. Dan'yama, the highest peak of Teshima at 330m, and the natural spring of Karato no Shimizu, at the foot of the mountain, also constitute an animistic experience through their interaction. Dan'yama is covered with *sudajii* (*castanopsis sieboldii*) – also known as the *itajii* – a broad leaf tree species common to western Japan. The abundance of *sudajii* indicates Dan'yama's significance as a sanctuary.

The Shinto shrine on top of the mountain enshrines the old sea god Ōwatatsumi Toyotamahiko. According to creation myths he is a son of Izanagi and Izanami, the couple who gave birth to Japanese land and many other things, until Izanami delivered fire and died from the burns he received. The fact that the sea god is enshrined on the highest peak on Teshima indicates that the entire mountain is personified as a sacred cultural space. Here,

the territoriality of the mountain blurs with that of the sea and island. Similarly, the shrine on top of Dan'yama is named Toyomine Gongen-jinja. The word *gongen* literally means 'power to appear' and suggests mediaeval animistic worship. In this case, the sea god is represented as an avatar of the Buddhist *devata* taking the form of a Shinto deity. Therefore, Dan'yama is an animistic god-like entity in its own right and has also served as a sanctuary as well as the subject of worship. In their totality, Teshima and Dan'yama are personified as a sacred animistic being. The Gongen shrine on the peak transforms the entire island into a subject of worship and the water system flowing from its ridges is the source of sustainability and, simultaneously, is sacred for its life-energy, an animistic reality.

Karato no Shimizu, which springs from the base of Dan'yama, is laden with symbols of folk beliefs. The Shinto shrine Kō-jinja, which is in the shade of the cliff and hard to see, is built behind the spring on a steep slope to spiritually protect the source (Figure 3). The spring water is preserved to use for drinking, washing and bathing. Kōjin, the enshrined, is a mysterious medieval deity of fertility who protects an assemblage of water source, sea, community and the mountain. The origin of Karato no Shimizu expresses its spiritual value. Legend accounts that during his journey through Teshima, the esoteric Buddhist monk Kūkai quenched his thirst by digging a hole with a stick to access water. The spring water thereby assembles the physical and devotional life of the esoteric Buddhist into a lived contemporary experience. In fact, Kūkai is the most important guardian of all pilgrims in western Japan, as he appears in numbers of legends and folktales taking important roles, such as in the legends about the origin of *ningyo no miira* (Suwa, 2018). The legend of Karato articulates that Kūkai is a personification of the connection between inland waters and the mountain because of the association between the mountain worship of Dan'yama and esoteric Buddhist disciplines.⁴ As a consequence, multiple layers of images of Karato no Shimizu and Dan'yama assemble a *shima*; it is a multiplicity, or a multifaceted *shima*, which is personified by Ōwatatsumi, the gongen, Kōjin, the monk Kūkai and the mountain and water system.

II. Sound and Extended Personhood

Two works by Christian Boltanski are exhibited on Teshima: *Les Archives du Cœur* and *Animitas: La Forêt des Murmures*. The former is preserved in a concrete building by the beach in Karato. Visitors to the archive are instructed by a staff member in a white coat to join the artist's project of collecting heartbeats from around the world (from people of all ages and health conditions) and have their heartbeat recorded and copied on a CD. The archive booth is open for listening to the recorded heartbeats. In a dark room in the pavilion, a light bulb flashes synchronically with a beat randomly selected from the archive. In contrast to in the Teshima Art Museum, the soundproof space of *Les Archives* is a closed one. However, *Les Archives* never alienates the heartbeat collection from its surroundings, as the art space effectively extends outside the building since the very experience of visiting Teshima conditions the effect of collection. The listening booth has a wide view of the beach through the window. After visiting the laboratory, the sound of the wind and sea overlap the memory of recording heartbeats. As a result, the unfamiliar experience around the building can generate the atmosphere of the artwork, or a stark memory of it, and the whole beach area can be felt as a *shima* and art space simultaneously.

⁴ Kūkai is also well known as the key figure for the pilgrimage of 88 sacred sites on Shikoku Island.



Figure 3 - Karato no Shimizu and Kō-jinja (author's photo, 2019).

Animitas: La Forêt des Murmures is located in the *sudajii* forest around the midpoint of the trail between Dan'yama and Karato. The road sign to the site is conveniently shown in English and the trail is rather wide, but it is unpaved, winding, and remote. From central Karato it takes over an hour to reach it, even by electric bike. As in Boltanski's other similar projects around the world, in *La Forêt des Murmures* numerous bell-shaped wind chimes are hung in the forest, each one with small plaques attached to it. The plaques feature handwritten names of all the participants in the project. Some 400 (now rusted) bronze bells are scattered around the site, although it is difficult to see them unless the visitor enters the forest for a closer look. It is through the aural effect, which the artist expresses as *murmures* in the title, that *La Forêt* creates an artistic space. The whole forest produces sound, softly or loudly, in an ensemble of trees, birds and bells when the wind blows. *La Forêt* sends a powerful message regarding memory and the anonymity of voiceless individuals (the life-long theme of the artist) and the birds that gather around the site seemingly respond to the sound of the bells. As the visitor approaches *La Forêt*, which is unseen from the trail, the sound of bells and the chirping of birds are heard simultaneously to form a singular but polyphonic assemblage.

Around Ieura, on Teshima's northwest coast, birds are always a problem for gardeners and empty aluminium cans are used as handmade noisemakers to keep them away. The cans are placed on top of poles to be blown by the wind from the sea (Figure 4). The empty cans make a sound as the wind blows them that is reminiscent of the bells in *La Forêt des Murmures*. These rusted cans are an icon of the livelihood and local sensibility of Ieura and, in this way, such memories can be remembered or imagined by those who pass by. The bronze bells and aluminium cans in the two different sites, the mountain and the sea, the artwork and everyday anonymous craft, converge into a personhood of Teshima, a trace of life assemblage. Sound-producing instruments with their sound patterns, therefore, generate and extend personhood. As a consequence, the sound spacing does not simply comprise actually resonating sound spaces; rather, associations that connect multiple origin or locations of resonations connect with each other to form a space of sound memory of *shima*. Personhood generated by sound production extends to assemble the mountain project site and old houses down by the bay, where artistic and local personhood evinces a territoriality.



Figure 4 - Aluminium can mounted to deter birds (author's photo, 2019).

The assemblage of Boltanski's artwork and handmade anti-pest apparatus in Ieura is not necessarily a network as there is no direct interrelationship between them. Rather, a surreal, accidental encounter takes place between them. Its real source of power comes from the fact that it opens up hitherto unseen assertions among the objects. This assemblage of *shima* becomes an open association in that anything on Teshima can potentially interrelate with anything else. Association by assemblage makes each space no longer an isolate but part of a rhizomatic *shima*. In this regard, the time-space of *shima* is assembled by a combination of itinerary and sensibility because movement makes the route that connects each space. Similarly, the installation and sound project in *Les Archives du Cœur* activates *shima* assemblage only after sensory experience enables the content of the archive embedded in its surroundings on Karato-hama beach to be appreciated. Personhood is extended from the sound of heartbeats recorded in *Les Archives* by imagining the faces of the generating

individuals. As the sound of the wind and waves provides memory of the beach, the heartbeats form an assemblage of/within *shima* and become inseparable from other sequences of experiences.

III. The Territoriality of Artwork and Shima

There are liminal creative artefacts on Teshima that are abandoned and slowly decaying amidst shrubs. Figure 5 shows one of several unidentified orb-like objects spotted in bamboo bush on the path between Ieura and Karato. There is no plaque to show any of the objects' identities. These perishing orbs seem to be made of bamboo but are heavily covered in moss and vines so that they resemble large bird nests. The general impression of the objects is of huge boils popping out of the earth or trees. The artists Mike and Doug Stern made a colossal outdoor piece entitled *Big Bambu* in an overgrown bamboo bush on the island of Naoshima for the 2013 Triennial, but no one is sure if they actually spent any time on any project on Teshima. As a result of such uncertainty, these remain as liminal, anonymous and ambiguous artwork-like objects. In this manner, the bamboo orbs, decaying, abandoned and forgotten in the bush, can be understood to represent an un-becoming of artwork.



Figure 5 - Artwork-like bamboo ball hanging in a tree (author's photo, 2019).

The process of decay makes such objects a work of art. While they do not show any quality of patina, the feel of ephemerality and abandonment assembles the un-becoming artworks into the time-space of *shima*. Decaying artworks assemble their surrounding environment, such as the rain, wind, rust, dirt, weeds, or the heat and light that affects them. In Kō-jinja shrine, Aoki Noe's metal artwork *Sora no Ryūshi* ('Particles in the Air') (2013) stands rusting (Figure 6). The silhouette of its metal structure resembles a climbing frame in a playground.

The rusty structure stands above a manhole, which is also rusted. In Figure 6, *Sora no Ryūshi* is nearly invisible from the camera angle; the thin structure in dull colours vanishes in the surrounding bamboo bush and vines. An empty concrete storage building with windows with dotted iron frames and a door is also part of the artwork, although a growth of vines inside and on the roof leaves a contrary impression (Figure 7).

As these photo examples illustrate, *Sora no Ryūshi*'s installation in Kō-jinja territorialises contemporary art and turns the everyday life of *shima* into a blurry image. The rusting artwork resembles an old rusty jungle gym in the playground, just like in many other playgrounds in the corner of Shinto shrines in the country. The artwork dissolves from its original context of contemporary art but becomes an assemblage of *shima*. Children can play around it and people pass by without even recognising its context. The artistic faculty of *Sora no Ryūshi* operates at the very point where it ceases to look like an artwork. Whereas public sculptures in parks are often uniform in function, the case of Teshima is different in that these artworks form an assemblage of *shima* in ensemble with each other. The museum and other projects resonate with *Sora no Ryūshi* so that the territoriality of the art space keeps extending and until it completely evades and eschews materiality. Had *Sora no Ryūshi* been a stand-alone project, the artwork would have remained isolated and maintained its singular identity as work of art (as in the case of most public sculptures). While isolation can maintain an artwork's identity, it confines it within a functional boundary of contemporary art to embellish public spaces, fulfilling a subordinate role to architecture. In contrast, *Sora no Ryūshi* does not stand for itself, as an artwork, but rather it generates an everyday life space



Figure 6 - *Sora no Ryūshi* (author's photo, 2019).



Figure 7 - *Sora no Ryūshi*: The façade of its concrete structure (author's photo, 2019).

through an assemblage due to the affectivity of the island comprised by the water, wind, plants and rust (Deleuze and Guattari, 1989). The patterned shape and materiality of iron make *Sora no Ryūshi* effectively an 'anti-jungle gym' or an 'anti-garage'. This affectivity extends to the broader space, including adjacent traditional architecture and the terraced rice paddy with wildflowers and the view of the sea. These imbue the surroundings of *Sora no Ryūshi* with an assemblage of the Shinto shrine and of Kūkai the Buddhist monk.

The whole space of Kō-jinja becomes an assembled artistic piece intensifying the here-and-now of time-space. Time is the key to territoriality and its affects. Humidity, precipitation and particles of saltwater blown by the sea wind make the artwork decay and deterritorialise into the void. As a result, it becomes difficult to discern which objects within the island may be authentic/official artworks. There is an ambiguity concerning the stone structures located next to the artworks. In fact, such a perception infuses the whole island, which can be experienced as an art space. As a consequence, the visitors' focus on the artworks also invites perceptions of the herringbone pattern of stone walls, grapevine trellises, or the abandoned buildings of the island as aestheticised within the same frame of perception and reference (Figures 8, 9 and 10).



Figure 8 - Herringbone pattern stonewall protecting a terrace, Karato (author's photo, 2019).



Figure 9 - Vine trellis below Kō-jinja (authors' photo, 2019).



Figure 10 - A colourfully painted abandoned building, Karato (author's photo, 2019).

IV. Multiple Passage and Polyphony

To follow an itinerary of art museums and installations around the island resembles a pilgrimage. Teshima has thirty-three sacred sites to worship during the day of O-Daishi-sama on March 21 (in the lunar calendar), that commemorates Kūkai who died in 835 AD. Throughout Japan there are traditional and modern pilgrim routes associated with the shrines of bodhisattva Kannon.⁵ Eighty-eight Kannon routes encircle the island of Shikoku, of which the longest is the best known. Since each pilgrim is guided by the spirit of Kūkai, serving refreshments to a pilgrim is considered to be an offering to the bodhisattva. As O-Daishi-sama is an honorific title for Kūkai, Teshima's thirty-three Kannon routes indicate a solid association with the saint. Communities welcome pilgrims and volunteers to cook and serve food and tea to them. O-Daishi-sama is a moment of celebration and its sometime toilsome passage is a process of becoming Kūkai. Kannon routes are manifestations of stages of discipline that pilgrims experience through their senses in terms of thirst, hunger, transition of terrain, the sound of the wind, panting heartbeats, drifting clouds and welcoming faces with refreshments. The pilgrimage of O-Daishi-sama territorialises *shima* through interactions and experiences.⁶

⁵ Kannon is also known as Guanyin or Avalokitasvara,

⁶ A similar phenomenon occurs in the case of the maritime Bentensai Festival in Sai (Suwa, 2017).

The legend of Kūkai assembles sacred sites on the hills and around the natural spring. Visitors and local residents (who become pilgrims) encounter events that they can only experience during O-Daishi-sama. A resident of Ioura Port, for instance, would seldom have a chance to see the other side of Dan'yama unless they are participating in O-Daishi-sama as they have no immediate relation to this part of the island. A unified route, such as a pilgrimage trail, joins the points along it and a tour that makes its itinerary a lived experience actively animating its symbols (as in the case of the legends, sacred objects and religious architecture of the Biwako area) (Suwa, 2018). The island's pilgrimage routes facilitate the experience of the alterity of everyday reality. The experience of pilgrimage is a program of sensibility. A pilgrim is catalysed by being programmed into Kūkai's personhood of mythical reality, which resonates with the feeling of falling rain, heartbeats, transpiration, the wind and so forth, in a manner that parallels *Les Archives du Cœur*.

On one evening during my stay on Teshima in March 2019, an old woman in the port of Ioura was walking her granddaughter on a tricycle. The moment gave me my only opportunity to converse with a local person in the small, quiet town. Without my referring to it, she mentioned O-Daishi-sama:

Now, it is March and getting close to O-Daishi-sama. I look forward to going every year but I can no longer walk up that far. Bad legs, you know. I used to have fun when I could keep walking all day long. (Author's translation)

O-Daishi-sama is certainly a pleasant event not only for this lady but just about anyone downtown, since the route of O-Daishi-sama from Ioura to the highlands and hinterlands of Karato takes them out of their territory. There are public facilities and a grocery store around the port, and the ferry takes members of the local population to medical facilities and shopping malls on the mainland. The island's highland area is less accessible and, as a result, the highland community's acceptance of lowland visitors during pilgrimage is a revitalising experience. As in many cases in Japan, each traditional local community comprises a *shima*, even if not expressed in such a folk term, in its own right, and their sense of identity is manifest in inter-communal exchanges (Suwa, 2007). In O-Daishi-sama the pilgrimage entails interaction between the host and the guest, and taking a pilgrimage allows the participant to experience the territoriality of successive *shima*. The roads around the island are home to various kinds of small statues and shrines for animistic and or syncretic worship that sometimes remain unidentified (Figure 11).⁷

Teshima has running gorges and little flatlands and is mostly covered with forests. Because of this, the route of O-Daishi-sama and the itinerary of the artworks tend to overlap. From any parts of the lowlands, the way to *La Forêt des Murmures* and *Sora no Ryūshi* take the same route as the traditional pilgrimage passage that connects the major O-Daishi-sama stations of Jūrinji Temple and the Kō-jinja area. This means that the visitors to *La Forêt des Murmures* inevitably see the graveyard of Jūrinji and the bells of *La Forêt des Murmures* are heard faraway after passing the graveyard. As a consequence, the itinerary evokes themes of life, death and anonymity. Similarly, *Les Archives du Cœur* is located at the end of the road that passes the Karato Hachimangū shrine. As the passage of Japanese folk religion overlaps with Boltanski's heartbeat collection, there emerges a singular experience and sensibility for life. As these instances show, the open-air artworks in Teshima interact in such a manner and with such an intensity that a visit can generate a feeling of passage. Overlapping passages

⁷ In the Kou districts, exiled Christian tombs from the Edo period are assembled near the beach. These unidentified statues tend to be kept tidily for fear of curses.

of artworks situated amidst traditional and religious structures produce an accidental polyphonic texture. A *shima* develops when simultaneous multiple voices assemble into a deep and complex cosmology of sensibility. The artworks of Teshima interact by intensifying the sensibility of polyphonic voices.



Figure 11 - Unidentified statue and shrine near Karato (author's photo, 2019).

Conclusion

The artworks of Teshima interact in such a manner that ordinary objects such as bamboo or bronze wind bells send sublime messages. In particular, anti-, non-, quasi- or crypto-artworks by the roadside start to appear as metaphors for existence *as if* they were artworks (as illustrated by Figures 5 and 8-10). They, too, generate a sense of a work of art in a similar manner to the bamboo structure represented in Figure 5. This is because the patterns of an object aligned or placed in island spaces generate a personhood. Therefore, the reality of sensory experience, which is generated by and generates the artworks in Teshima, permeates its surroundings as it transforms the passage into an assemblage of *shima*.

The Teshima artworks interact artistically by deterritorialising themselves so that they assemble a space of *shima*. This is rather remarkable in that in contemporary contexts art has been considered chronotopic, discrete and 'closed'. As James Clifford has remarked:

Modern practices of art and culture collecting, scientific and avant-guard, have situated themselves at the end of a global history... The ethnic neighbourhoods, the provincial reminders, the Chinese Opera Company, the feathered Indian in the library, the works of art from other continents and eras that turn up in dealers' closets: all are survivals, remnants of threatened or vanished traditions. The world's cultures appear in the chronotope as shreds of

humanity, degraded commodities, or elevated great art but always functioning as vanishing “loopholes” or “escapes” from a one-dimensional fate (1988: 244).

Teshima's artworks evade Clifford's pessimism (or sarcasm) by letting themselves decay, become obscure and blurred as they reterritorialise themselves into local ways of life. They are permanently embedded in their surroundings. In Teshima, art experience becomes tangible only through feeling the sound of wind or similar sensory experiences and the artwork sites generate their vortex of sensibility through acts of passage.

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