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Puppetry Networks of the Island of Naoshima

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The Naoshima Onna Bunraku, an all-female bunraku troupe on the island of Naoshima in Japan's Seto Inland Sea, has revitalized a puppetry tradition dating back to the Edo period (1603–1868). This article examines how the Naoshima Onna Bunraku negotiates the pull of its local, community-oriented past and its global present as a folk performing art on an island now known for art tourism as the site of the Setouchi Triennale. I trace Naoshima's puppetry networks from the Seto Inland Sea that nurtured their ancestors to new networks that extend globally to reveal the dynamic flows that animate and sustain puppetry on Naoshima.

A wooden boat lies on a stretch of beach on the island of Naoshima. Puppeteers stand behind the hull to operate large wooden puppets. They work in teams of three, delicately manipulating the arms, legs, heads and faces of the puppets in rhythm with the narration and melodies of the chanter and shamisen player. In this performance in 2010, the troupe, the Naoshima Onna Bunraku (Naoshima Women's Bunraku) deliberately conjured a performance from the island's puppetry past. In the nineteenth century, male puppeteers performed with an overturned fishing boat as their stage and the beach as the communal space for the audience to celebrate the end of a successful fishing season. As in the performances two centuries before, the puppeteers in 2010 performed against the backdrop of the Seto Inland Sea. The calm, blue waters are dotted with the outlines of scattered islands on the horizon. Water, air and sun: these natural elements hold a palpable presence in the outdoor performance. Architect Sambuichi Hiroshi calls these elements the 'moving materials' that are at the core of site-specific work on Naoshima.[1] The puppeteers, breathing together to maintain their connection to each other, channel these materials through the movements of their bodies so that the wooden puppets take life and tell their stories.

While the formal aspects of the 2010 performance recall the past, the performance differs significantly from the island's predecessors in its audience. In 2010, domestic and international tourists mixed in among the locals as this performance was tied to a different island rhythm: not the seasonal rhythm of the harvest but the touristic rhythm of the Setouchi Triennale. The sleepy fishing island transformed in the early twentieth century as it industrialized, which brought a period of economic prosperity before a sharp decline in industry in the 1960s and corresponding declines in the local economy and population. In the 1990s, the Benesse Corporation stepped in to create a new future for the island. Akimoto Yūji, the first curator and later director of the island's art and architecture programme, articulated the goal for the artistic

initiatives to bring together art, architecture, local history and nature in a way that would change 'one nameless location to a unique location'.[2] The success of the artistic project has been enormous. Tourists now visit Naoshima from the rest of Japan, elsewhere in Asia and across the globe. The *New York Times* travel section listed Naoshima as one of the '52 Places to Go in 2019' and ran a profile on the island and its art in November of the same year.[3] This out-of-the-way island has become a hub for global art tourism, and the puppetry traditions, once linked to the ebb and flow of harvests, festivals and community life, are now linked to the influx of tourists and Naoshima's newfound place on the world art stage.

Many folk performing arts in Japan are caught between local traditions and a new tourist economy.[4] The national government has supported folk arts under the Cultural Properties Protection Law since its enactment in 1950. The support under the Cultural Properties Protection Law privileges conservation, authenticity and the continuation of tradition.[5] In contrast, since the 1990s, local governments have used folk performing arts to promote tourism and so have encouraged adapting the performances to contemporary sensibilities and fostering a home-town nostalgia (*furusato-zukuri*) as a way to revitalize depopulated rural spaces in economic decline.[6] Recently, scholars and funders have reconsidered their disparagement of folk performers who take advantage of tourism as a way to sustain themselves and their art forms. Hashimoto Hiroyuki, for example, has called on the scholarly community to redress its failure to take into consideration the 'imagination and creativity [these artists show] by working with diverse resources, including the social context of tourism, to reorganize themselves within an ever-changing situation'.[7] For the Naoshima Onna Bunraku, the social context is particularly complex as they are poised between the traditions of their local community and the newly created identity for the island as an international art destination.

The Naoshima Onna Bunraku negotiates the pulls of a local, community-oriented past and a global, forward-thinking present. They sustain themselves through their willingness to adapt to new circumstances. Like the visual artists and architects who come to Naoshima to create site-specific works, the puppetry troupe ground their performances in the natural elements of the island. They also draw on the puppetry network of the Seto Inland Sea that nurtured their ancestors. In their performances, they reposition their traditions and the specificity of Naoshima to speak to shifting audiences that now range from the local to the global. They rely on the 'moving materials' of the island, but they are also supported by the human networks that extend across the Seto Inland Sea to Osaka and even abroad. To highlight the range of networks that have been crucial to cultivating puppetry on Naoshima, I draw upon Tessa Morris-Suzuki's model of a 'liquid area studies'.[8] Morris-Suzuki describes how the lens of liquid area studies demonstrates that 'rather than being seen as embedded in geography, and thus constant over millennia, cultural areas come to be seen as dynamic and overlapping, constantly created and re-created by human movement and interaction'.[9] Although Japanese folk performing arts are thought of as isolated, rural activities linked to a nostalgic past, the approach of liquid area studies reveals the

dynamic flows of human activity that are the critical moving material of puppetry on Naoshima.

Puppetry networks of the Seto Inland Sea

During the Edo period (1603–1868), the Seto Inland Sea brought puppetry to Naoshima alongside the fish and travellers upon which the island's economy depended. Naoshima, a small island of eight square kilometres, is part of a collection of islands nestled in the Seto Inland Sea between the main island of Honshū and the islands of Shikoku and Kyūshū. Today, the ferry ride from the city of Okayama on Honshū takes about twenty minutes. Despite this proximity, during the Edo period most of Naoshima's artistic and economic exchange flowed toward the Seto Inland Sea, particularly nearby Awaji island and the Tokushima area of Shikoku. The waters of the inland sea were considered friendly and navigable, unlike the treacherous ocean waters that lay beyond.[10] While the newly developed road system that linked the provinces to the capital city, Edo (modern-day Tokyo), including the famous Tōkaidō from Kyoto to Edo, have been explored in detail by scholars for the range of people, goods and culture that moved over these land routes, the sea routes have been less well studied.[11] Yet, in the Edo period, these water-based networks nourished Naoshima.

The puppetry that developed in the Seto Inland Sea region, with Awaji as its central hub, was markedly different from the form then practised in Osaka, the other major puppetry centre in early modern Japan.[12] The Japanese puppet theatre (*ningyō jōruri*, later known as bunraku), which grew out of two competing styles of chanted storytelling, includes three main performers: the chanter (*tayū*), who performs all the narrative passages, dialogue for the characters and songs; the shamisen player, who provides melodic and rhythmic accompaniment; and the puppeteers, who operate the puppets. Early puppets were operated by a single puppeteer, but over the course of the eighteenth century the puppets became larger, with a greater range of motion and articulation.[13] These larger puppets came to be operated by three puppeteers, one for the head and right arm, one for the left arm, and one for the feet for male characters or the hem of the robe for female characters. Unlike Osaka puppetry, which was primarily performed in commercial theatres, Awaji puppetry was closer to its ritual roots and still used by itinerant performers for religious purposes. Awaji puppetry developed for outdoor performances, so the puppets were larger and wilder than the delicate puppets used for indoor performances in Osaka.[14] The two traditions later converged, but, since the early modern era, puppetry from the Seto Inland Sea has had its own unique identity, performance style and puppets.

Puppetry first came to Naoshima via Awaji, which has a long tradition of puppetry for ritual and entertainment (*Awaji ningyō*).[15] Each spring, the head of the fishing association on Naoshima brought a puppetry troupe of about twenty artists from Awaji to perform in celebration of the red snapper harvest and the corresponding eighty-eight-night festival (*hachijūhachiya*).[16] These artists performed puppet plays over consecutive nights for the Naoshima community, and on the final night local islanders joined in and performed as puppeteers alongside the Awaji troupe.

Over time, Naoshima developed its own puppetry tradition out of these festival performances. Four families owned puppets, and thus became the main performers and the caretakers of the puppetry tradition. During the Edo period, Naoshima's puppets had small eyes and noses that were drawn on with ink, unlike the more intricate puppets used by the troupe today.[17] Puppetry thrived on the island in part because it was under the direct rule of the Tokugawa shoguns, the military and political leaders of Japan during the Edo period. The shoguns sponsored kabuki and other arts on the island, which brought tourists from around the region for performances.[18] In Naoshima's case, even in the Edo period, puppetry served multiple functions and its performances were attended by the local community and tourists.

The Tokushima area of Shikoku was another node on the puppetry network of the Seto Inland Sea. In the Edo period, the Hachisuka family, who headed the Awa clan, whose lands included Awaji and the Tokushima area, served as patrons of puppetry.[19] In a similar fashion to Naoshima, professional troupes from Awaji toured in Tokushima, so the local puppetry that developed was performed by amateurs, mostly farmers, for festive occasions.[20] Tokushima puppetry (*Awa ningyō jōruri*) did not use the three-operator puppet until the nineteenth century, and is characterized by the expressive faces on the puppets, the lively interaction with the audiences, and a special technique for the rapid changing of the scenery created by screens connected with strings to shift quickly.[21] Tokushima was another hub on this island network that circulated artists, performance techniques and puppets between the islands.

The flows of puppets and performance practices between Awaji, Tokushima and Naoshima came to an abrupt end in 1873. Members of Naoshima's puppetry troupe travelled to Tokushima to purchase new puppets, and on their return trip their ship was wrecked, killing two members of the troupe. The accident decimated the troupe's morale and the remaining members never performed again. The puppets continued to be passed on to subsequent generations, but the performance tradition ceased.

The desire to revive Naoshima's puppetry tradition surfaced during the postwar period along with a general interest in revitalizing folk performing arts across Japan. The war had suspended the activities of many folk performing-arts groups, and as peace returned, local residents grew interested in returning to their local traditions.[22] In many cases, women led the charge to revive a tradition that had been practised exclusively by men in premodern and early modern times.[23] Likewise, on Naoshima, four women, including one whose male ancestor had been a member of the Edo-period troupe and from whom she had inherited the puppets, revived bunraku on the island in 1948.[24] This initial group had not intended to create a female-only troupe, but as only women expressed interest in participating, it became an all-female group by default and came to be called the Naoshima Onna Bunraku. At the start, puppeteers comprised the entirety of the troupe and performances were simple, often on a boat on the island's shore. After their first performance in 1949, three new people joined to add musical accompaniment, so they were able to perform with a chanter and shamisen. Ten years later, in 1959, they were designated 'intangible

cultural property' (*mukeibunkazai*) by Kagawa Prefecture and an official association (*kōenkai*) was inaugurated to support their activities.[25]

Today, the island network still sustains the puppetry tradition, but now it moves through the urban centre of Osaka. Osaka, which had been the centre for commercial puppet theatre in the eighteenth century, is also linked to the Seto Inland Sea puppetry network through its position as a port on Osaka Bay, which connects it to sea trade with Awaji and other points in western Japan. Osaka's commercial puppet theatres failed in the late eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Uemura Bunrakuken, a chanter from Awaji, came to Osaka to establish a training school, and later his descendants established a puppet theatre and re-established the puppetry tradition in Osaka. Today, Osaka's puppetry nutures the amateurs on Naoshima.

Yoshida Bunshi, a puppeteer with the National Bunraku Theatre, visits Naoshima once a year to train the puppeteers. Bunshi, who grew up in Tokushima and learned puppetry as a child as part of the local puppetry traditions there, continues to support puppetry traditions in the Seto Inland Sea as he performs in Osaka and Tokyo.

The Naoshima Onna Bunraku troupe today perform under the direction of Konishi Shimako with eight puppeteers and five musicians, including three chanters and three shamisen players (Fig. 1).[26] The troupe own puppet heads created by the master craftsman Ōe Minosuke from Tokushima in addition to puppet heads designed for single-operator puppets, which are used by children. The troupe have thirty-two rehearsal books (*keiko bon*), nine performance books (*yukahon*) and two *maruhon*.

Fig. 1 **The Naoshima Onna Bunraku following a performance at Naoshima Hall, 11 July 2017. Photograph by Jérémie Souteyrat.**

There are two child members and approximately twelve children training at the local school, both girls and boys. The Naoshima Onna Bunraku receives logistical and financial support from the Naoshima Board of Education and the local government. The Board of Education sponsors their work with elementary-school children and organizes their performances in the schools, at local festivals, at the Setouchi Triennale and at festivals outside Naoshima. The local government provides financial support to maintain the puppets and costumes, pay for the rehearsal room when Bunshi travels to train the puppeteers, and travel expenses.[27] The troupe rehearse twice a week in Naoshima Hall. They perform approximately five times a year in Naoshima Hall, a few times a year at the local Wellness Centre, and sometimes travel to perform within the region, such as in Takamatsu, Shōdoshima, Okayama and Kyoto. Additionally, during the years of the Setouchi Triennale, they often give one performance as part of the festival.

Puppetry on Naoshima has always been sustained by the water-based network of the Seto Inland Sea and participants in the local community. Naoshima's puppetry's dual basis in its geography and its people has set its course throughout its history. As an island in the Seto Inland Sea, Naoshima's geographic position has opened it to the circulation of artists, repertoire and puppets from other puppetry locations in its trade routes, particularly Awaji and Tokushima. At the same time, human action has been a dynamic player in the tradition's development. The family stewards of the tradition grew the form during the Edo period. Despite the tragic loss of troupe members in 1873, family stewards maintained the puppet heads for generations before the form's revival at the hands of new, this time female, stewards. Patrons, first the Tokugawa shoguns and now the Board of Education, have made the performances possible. Once primarily a local community folk art with a regional network, the changes on the island brought about by the participation of the Benesse Corporation beginning in the 1990s have created new networks, new audiences, new challenges and new opportunities for the Naoshima Onna Bunraku.

Global networks and art tourism

Since the 1990s, Naoshima has become known as a destination for contemporary art and architecture. The island hosts seven structures designed by internationally renowned architect Andō Tadao. These include museums, such as the Lee Ufan Museum, the Chichu Art Museum and the Benesse Art Site Naoshima. There are also a number of site-specific works and installations built into the landscape and in repurposed old residences. Beginning in 2010, the island began to host the Setouchi Triennale, which brings famous visual artists from around the world to do art installations on Naoshima and other nearby islands in the Seto Inland Sea. In 2016, Japan Tourism awarded its first Grand Prize to the Setouchi Triennale Executive Committee for attracting more than a million visitors over the course of 108 days to the festival.[28] The structural and visual aspects of the buildings and the artworks are designed to merge with the landscape and highlight the island's scenery and nature. The connection with place is part of what connects the old Naoshima, of fishing villages

and community puppetry traditions at festivals, with the new Naoshima, with its tourist economy as a global art destination.

Benesse, a corporation specializing in test preparation and language schools, has been investing in art on Naoshima for about twenty years through the impetus of its chairman, Fukutake Sōichirō, an art lover originally from the region.[29] The development of the island has emphasized the integration of the art and architecture with the landscape. This includes structures built into the landscape, such as the structures designed by Andō Tadao. The art, architecture and installations fit into the natural environment of the island. The Chichu museum, for instance, is built directly into the landscape in an unobtrusive way with only a few concrete structures that betray its presence. Critic Miwon Kwon has observed that Andō's Chichu 'aspires toward architecture as ground, architecture not just sensitive to or bound to a place, but one with it'.[30] Inside the museum, too, the landscape remains a critical element within the museum. For example, the room that houses one of Claude Monet's large-format paintings of water lilies is lit using only natural light. The floor is composed of small cubes of white marble. Visitors must remove their shoes and exchange them for slippers before entering. The light filters in from a narrow window in the ceiling that circumnavigates the room and is reflected off the white marble to illuminate the painting. For the visitor, the experience of being underground in a room fully lit by natural light draws attention to the exterior landscape even though it is hidden from view.

The connections with the landscape and nature are an integral aspect of the new artistic development on the island. The curator of the Setouchi Triennale, Kitagawa Fram, highlighted the connections between nature and aesthetics when he stated, 'Japan has suffered more than anywhere the drama of modernization and massive scale urbanization, losing touch with nature, with community, and with ancient aesthetic sense.'[31] The *New York Times* attested that domestic and foreign tourists are lured by the island's 'intriguing harmony of culture and nature'.[32] The architecture offers an image of seamless integration between the man-made structures and the pristine beauty of the landscape, but this landscape viewed now in connection with the architecture is not an enduring, unchanging landscape. In the Edo period, Naoshima prospered as a transport hub and for its fishing industry, but in the early twentieth century it became the site of a copper smeltery, which devastated the ecology of the island.[33] This industry declined in the 1960s and was replaced with an industrial waste disposal facility, which further tarnished the island's reputation. The art on the island now celebrates a relationship with nature in contrast to the island's industrial past. In this way, it represents a future for the island in art and in tourism.

The performances that the Naoshima Onna Bunraku have presented for the Setouchi Triennale embrace the landscape and natural elements of the island in harmony with the art and architecture celebrated in the festival. In the Naoshima Onna Bunraku performance at the inaugural Setouchi Triennale in 2010 referenced at the opening of this essay, the troupe performed outdoors along the shore near the Benesse Art Site. The setting and performance blended tradition and innovation. The performance was held on a traditional boat that recalled the early Naoshima

Onna Bunraku performances from the immediate post-war period, which were performed outdoors behind a boat to obscure the legs of the puppeteers as they operated the puppets. The boat for the 2010 performance was commissioned and constructed by local shipbuilder Tsuda Takashi according to traditional practices. The type of boat, its position on the shore, and the use of the boat as the stage reflect the troupe's post-war performance practices. Some elements diverged from the older performances, which were quite sparse and used a combination of full puppets and only puppet heads for some of the characters. In pre-war performances, the puppeteers, who operate the puppets in view of the audience, were dressed in everyday clothes. The 2010 performance had much more opulent costumes for the puppets, full puppets for each character and puppeteers in formal dress. The use of the boat and the island scenery fit neatly into the conceptual framework of the various projects of the Benesse sites, which emphasize the relationship between the artworks and the natural surroundings. In terms of repertoire, the troupe presented a traditional piece alongside a new piece. The first performance featured the folk god Ebisu, which recalls the very earliest bunraku performances, which were ritual puppetry performances at shrines that told the Ebisu story.[34] The second performance included an opera singer, who performed a section of *Madama Butterfly*. This performance was unusual for the Naoshima Onna Bunraku because it usually presents a more traditional repertoire and performs in theatres or outdoors at shrines rather than with the fishing boat. The focus on landscape in the 2010 Setouchi Triennale performance used the landscape to mediate between the traditional performance and the contemporary art festival.

The popularity and growth of the Benesse Corporation's work on Naoshima continue to bring change to the island. I noticed these changes on two separate visits, in 2013 and 2019. In this six-year period, the infrastructure for visiting the island was greatly improved, with a new ferry that was more accessible and faster. For the Naoshima Onna Bunraku, the largest change was the construction of Naoshima Hall for the 2016 Setouchi Triennale designed by Sambuichi Hiroshi (Fig. 2). Naoshima Hall is a multipurpose building inspired by traditional architecture that houses a stage, space for community gatherings, facilities to serve as a shelter during environmental disaster, and gardens. The stage design is based on the outdoor agricultural stages often used in the Edo period in the Shikoku and Seto region.[35] Placed at the rear of the large community gathering space, the performers can use it to face the interior of the space or to face out towards a platform that extends into the garden, which can itself be used for the tea ceremony or performances. The troupe uses Naoshima Hall as a rehearsal and performance space.

At the 2019 Setouchi Triennale, the Naoshima Onna Bunraku performed in Naoshima Hall as part of the festival. The performance featured pieces from the traditional repertoire, first the celebratory dance *Sanbasō*, and then a scene from *The Courtesan in Naruto in the Province of Awa* (*Keisei Awa no Naruto*, 1768) about the affection between a mother and child despite a lifelong separation, which is a favourite for troupes across the Seto Inland Sea region for its local setting. Approximately 200 people attended, including both islanders and tourists from other

Fig. 2 **The Naoshima Onna Bunraku perform at Naoshima Hall with the traditional stage open to the outdoors. 11 July 2017. Photograph by Jérémie Souteyrat.**

areas. Reporting on the performance for *Asahi Shinbun*, Ozaki Ayumi remarked on how the stage created the feeling of a traditional stage from the Edo period (*shibai koya*) and how audience members related being moved by the performance.[36] After the performance, troupe leader Konishi encouraged those interested in bunraku to begin learning it themselves.

This poignant ending of the 2019 performance demonstrates the need for continuity of artists in addition to the support, space and audiences that the success of the festival has brought to the Naoshima Onna Bunraku. As a folk performing art, it is a living art and requires human participation to continue. Akihiro Odanaka has pointed out that this central tension between tradition and living practice is built into the term for folk performing arts in Japanese, *minzoku geinō*. The term combines folklore (*minzoku*) and popular performing arts (*geinō*) and thus holds within it the past and tradition (*minzoku*) and the living made present in performance (*geinō*).[37] The necessity for the active engagement of artists is what sets Naoshima's bunraku apart from the art and architecture of the island, which conjure stillness, as puppetry requires breath and movement.[38]

Puppetry futures

The Naoshima Onna Bunraku faces challenges and opportunities created by the new flows that move to, from and within the island. Morris-Suzuki observes in her liquid

area studies approach that 'rather than being a solid thing, embedded in the bedrock of geography, an area is rather like a fountain, which is given shape only by constant activity or movement'.[39] The landscape of Naoshima plays a key role in shaping the art, architecture and culture, including the bunraku, but the movement of people, especially for folk performing art practices like bunraku, is especially important. Naoshima, like many rural communities in Japan, has suffered from depopulation. In 1955, Naoshima had a population of 7,501. The population had decreased to merely 3,325 by 2010, with the population of those over sixty-five accounting for a third of its residents.[40] Recently, these trends have begun to reverse. The economic success of the Setouchi Triennale has paved the way for new private businesses and for domestic migration to the islands. In 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 the inflow of residents was greater than the outflow, and many of the newcomers are in their twenties.[41]

In the era of globalization, new puppetry networks have been born that extend from Naoshima to more distant seas. In 2012–13, the Japan Foundation sponsored an artistic exchange between members of the Naoshima Onna Bunraku and faculty and students at the University of the Philippines. Faculty member Amparo Adelina C. Umali visited Naoshima as part of a study of how local governments participate in cultural heritage preservation.[42] Following her visit, several puppeteers from the Naoshima Onna Bunraku travelled to the Philippines to train a group of students at the University of the Philippines and perform alongside Filipino artists in honour of Philippines–Japan Friendship Day. In the early summer of 2013, the students were flown to Naoshima to perform for the local community alongside the Naoshima Onna Bunraku and the children's puppetry troupe (Fig. 3). At the performance in Naoshima in 2013, the Filipino student performance of *Sanbasō* was warmly received by the audience as a celebration of international friendship and the spread of the appreciation of bunraku. However, the performance in the Philippines met with some apprehension from local audiences who objected to holding festivities for Philippines–Japan friendship in the same month as the celebration of the liberation of Manila, the month-long battle to free the Philippines from Japanese colonial rule that resulted in mass casualties and the devastation of cultural properties.[43] The exchange with students at the University of the Philippines demonstrates the complexities that arise as global flows intersect with Naoshima. Flows that connect spaces also activate memories and histories of those places. Performances in Naoshima along the shore stir Naoshima's puppetry history, including its post-war revitalization and its long tradition in the Edo period, and affirm the island's culture and heritage. But performed in the Philippines, the performance can kindle histories of colonial oppression and wartime suffering.

The flows that bring artists, repertoire and audiences to and from Naoshima have shifted over time. Once primarily connected to the Seto Inland Sea and the puppetry centres of Awaji and Tokushima, today the main ferry terminal conveys people to and fro between Naoshima and Japan's main island. The Seto Inland Sea network remains present through the performance traditions, the material objects of the puppets and the training from the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka. But increasingly the role of the Setouchi Triennale in shaping the island's economy, infrastructure, art and culture has placed the Naoshima Onna Bunraku in global flows of people and aesthetics.

FIG. 3 **Children training in bunraku wait backstage for their performance holding a puppet of Ebisu. 2 June 2013. Photograph by the author.**

Kwon has written that 'the aesthetic experience at Naoshima, or more accurately the comprehensive aesthetic experience *of* Naoshima, provides rare encounters of intimacy with not only deeply resonant artworks, but also extraordinary architecture and a unique natural setting that together resist, quietly yet forcefully, the trappings of consumerist spectacle culture'.[44] The intimacy of the encounter is perhaps most pronounced in the practice of the Naoshima Onna Bunraku, for whom the body and breath are at the centre of their art. The flows of the Seto Inland Sea, the Setouchi Triennale and larger patterns of globalization swirl around the Naoshima Onna Bunraku, but at the centre are the bodies of the artists, without whom the practice cannot continue.

The importance of the living presence of artists is one of the greatest challenges in charting a future for the Naoshima Onna Bunraku. The operation of the puppets is a physical act that requires strength, particularly for the lead puppeteer. Puppets are heavy, weighing between ten and fifty pounds, and it requires dexterity to manipulate

the smaller articulations of the hands and face. In addition, their movement must be coordinated between the three puppeteers. The puppeteers synchronize their breath to align each of their individual movements with each other so that the puppet appears as one cohesive being with vital energy. As puppeteer and Living National Treasure Yoshida Tamao once explained, 'It is the artistry of revealing the *hara* – the inner center of emotion and spirit – that the chief puppeteer wants to attain as he works with the left-arm operator and the leg operator.'[45] The bodies of the performers must work together to bring forth a sense of life and expression in the body of the puppet, work that requires physical strength, discipline, coordination and intimate connection with the other puppeteers.

Living artists are also crucial to the transmission of the practice and repertoire of bunraku. While the Naoshima Onna Bunraku shares performance practices and repertoire with the National Bunraku Theatre and puppet theatres on Awaji and Tokushima, they have also developed some pieces on their own, primarily a dance piece featuring the god Ebisu, which they transmit directly to members of the troupe and the children's company.[46] Traditionally, bunraku passes down from performer to performer. First, new members learn to hand stage props, such as fans or swords, to the other puppeteers in time with the play's action. Then, they learn to operate the puppet's legs and, later, the left hand. Finally, they take the role of lead puppeteer and operate the right hand and the head. The training unfolds over years, often decades. While the troupe maintain connections with other puppetry troupes in the region and in Osaka and teach puppetry in the local schools, their members are ageing and there remains a necessity to pass the traditions to a new generation. Despite the new flows of money, facilities and audience to the island and the willingness of the artists to adapt to their new circumstances, without new members to join the troupe the tradition will not be able to continue.

Even the preservation of the history of the troupe relies on oral transmission. Some archives for the group exist, such as a small exhibit on the island with images, a few puppets and the boat that Tsuda Takashi crafted for the 2010 performance. There are scattered materials that can be uncovered in newspaper accounts, photographs and mentions in history books of the region. However, no comprehensive or cumulative archiving has been undertaken. The troupe do not have a repository of performance posters and programmes, oral histories, video documentation or other artefacts that would enable the continuation of the art form as archive. The main archive they possess is the material objects of the puppets and the rehearsal and performance books, which embody the performance traditions. Yet, without a living artist to manipulate them or give them voice, they cannot communicate these traditions. Thus the living artists themselves are the main holders of the troupe's memory and practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified the challenges facing the troupe. Performances, visits from master artists and rehearsals were suspended. While the troupe's activities have since resumed, the halt of performances and training sessions during the pandemic made it difficult for the members to develop their skills and recruit new members to fill the troupe's ranks as its lead artists age.[47]

Conclusion

The Naoshima Onna Bunraku has been a vibrant presence in the island's local culture and the ebbs and flows of community life since its beginnings as a folk performing art of local fishermen. It depends on the living presence of its artists, without whom the tradition will die away, as it did from the late nineteenth century until its revival in the post-war period. Naoshima's puppetry has been nurtured by the networks that have brought artists, materials, repertoire, audiences and financial support to their shores through the regional network of the Seto Inland Sea, and more recently through the global art tourism network cultivated by the Setouchi Triennale. The Naoshima Onna Bunraku's performances connect to the island's history, landscape and natural elements, the moving materials of the island. For the Naoshima Onna Bunraku, the human breath is the most crucial moving material of all. The artists are embedded in a dynamic and ever-changing world and must adapt their traditional performance form to see it preserved and given life. Many traditional performing art forms across Japan and more widely in Asia face the challenges of adapting to new conditions, modern technology and aesthetics, and artistic tourism.[48] The liquid area studies approach reveals the interconnections between artistic communities – even those presumed isolated on a tiny island, like the puppetry of Naoshima. Morris-Suzuki reminds us that cultural areas are 'constantly created and re-created by human movement and interaction'.[49] With the island's reinvention as a global centre for art and culture, perhaps the flows of people, artistic practices and ideas will give the Naoshima Onna Bunraku the means to sustain itself into the future.

NOTES

1 Hiroshi Sambuichi, *Sambuichi and the Seto Inland Sea* (Tokyo: Toto Publishing, 2016), p. 183.

2 Miwon Kwon, 'A Position of Elsewhere: Lessons from Naoshima', in Fukutake Foundation, ed., *Naoshima: Nature, Art, Architecture* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 147–67, here p. 151.

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30 Kwon, 'A Position of Elsewhere', p. 155.

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33 Kondo, 'Revitalization of a Community', p. 50.

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