

Eugenio Barba

Words Hiding Love

Love has many faces and one of them is friendship, a particular feeling of belonging, sharing and intimacy. Such a bond united me to Natsu.

Natsu appeared in my life one day in Volterra, Italy, in 1981 where I was leading a two-month session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA). She knew prof. Moriaki Watanabe and Katsuko Azuma who were collaborating with me and wished to greet them there. Consequently, Natsu spent several days with us following the intense work programme that started at six in the morning and ended late in the night.

Natsu interacted with the numerous Asian and Western artists participating in the ISTA: the Indian dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi and the composer and musician Ragunath Panigrahi, the artistic family of the Balinese master I Wayan Tempo, Jerzy Grotowski and Dario Fo, and especially her friend Moriaki Watanabe and the Japanese ensemble led by Katsuko Azuma, an expert in what at that time was called *buyo kabuki*.

Natsu and I met daily and exchanged a few words during the concentrated daily programme. A deep bond was established during those short contacts. Natsu became acquainted with my approach to theatre anthropology, and she continued to follow my research to such a point that she translated into Japanese the main book on this field written by Nicola Savarese and me, *The Secret Art of the Performer*, which was then published by Parco in 1988.

In 1983, I spent two months in Tokyo. There Natsu introduced me to her friend and teacher, Tatsumi Hijikata, and she took me to Kazuo Ohno's house in Yokohama where the old sorcerer gave free lessons to his old and new pupils. Natsu and I used to go for long walks together. She showed me her secret places in Tokyo which she enjoyed visiting alone: small, beautiful gardens suffocated by skyscrapers, a temple in the periphery close to an antiques bookshop, an astonishing silent street in the noisy Shibuya. We walked while she told me about her beginnings in *butoh*, about Hijikata and Ohno's extraordinary feats and struggles, and together we went to all *butoh* performances being shown. But most importantly, in a poetical way, she introduced me to her inner world and way of thinking and feeling, from which sprang the technical principles of her dance.

Every year, from 1983 until 2000, I would work two or three weeks in Tokyo to prepare a new ISTA session with the Japanese artists who would participate. I spent much of my time with Natsu. She participated in two ISTA sessions, giving demonstrations and performances, in Bologna (Italy) in 1990 and in Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1996.

Deep friendship is a bond that can defy distance. Natsu and I wrote regularly to each other describing and commenting our projects and feats. She sent me videos and photographs that moved me, and as music, sweet memories would arise.

I met her unexpectedly in Mexico City in February 2024. We were happy as we sat one beside the other eating lunch together with a few friends. She told me that she was travelling to stay with another common friend, the dancer Lola Lince, in Guanajuato. Her eyes smiled as a lake of serenity. A few days later I was told she had passed away. I did not feel a deep sorrow because I knew she was dancing until her last day. I also know that I will soon meet her again.



Natsu Nakajima and Eugenio Barba, Mexico City, 2024. Photo: Stefano Di Buduo