

A journey towards serenity and joy
Biodanza and
Psychotherapy in a
creative dance

Acknowledgments

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for your intuition and knowing, for consistency and determination to help me understand the work of Biodanza in my life, for believing I could carry this work to others, for trusting me to hold your space, for your friendship and love, for sisterhood

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Rolando Toro - Founder of Biodanza
for creating a system that changed my life, for being an imperfect, interesting man - not a God. How I wish I'd met you.

Photographs: Lwazi Hlope, Valu Ribero and Michele Dean



Kate

Franz

Carolina

Kenneth

Rolando

thank
you

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Biodanza, and Psychotherapy in a creative dance

BIODANAZA MONOGRAPH
MICHELE KATHERINE DEAN
MY PERSONAL STORY



*This monograph is dedicated to Kate Clement,
who threw me off a cliff because she believed I
would fly*

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1 Intro

“Many things appear impossible.
Sometimes a subtle energy intervenes.
The wonder lies in everyday.
Even without longing for it
we dance into the possibility.”

Rolando Toro



This is my personal story of transformation. I hope it will inspire those who have suffered similarly to explore Biodanza as a tool to enhance their recovery from addictive substances or relationships. I hope it will encourage them to enter a place of surrender and become willing to dance with life. Biodanza rebuilds the identity in an integrated way. I believe my story will show that Biodanza has the power to re-integrate the addict into society without labels, stigma or shame - but as a positive, whole and liberated individual who is much more than an addict, who is in fact, a dancer of Life.

Eight years ago, on Boxing day 2005, I suffered a traumatic incident. A gift. Soon after the Boxing day incident I started psychotherapy and Biodanza at the same time and very shortly thereafter gave up drinking and embarked on a programme of Recovery using The 12 Steps. These three things contributed simultaneously to a complete transformation in my life

In this monograph I will describe how change and healing happened in my life -

1. Through 8 consistent years of Biodanza

From November 2005 until now March 2014. The process of beginning to heal from a place of brokenness, diving deeper into Encounters and workshops, doing the Personal Development course and becoming a facilitator holding a weekly group.

2. Supported by 4 years of therapy and The 12 Step Recovery Programme

From January 2006 until January 2010. I will make a link between the first 6 Steps of Recovery and the theory behind Biodanza and how it was simultaneously impacting on my life in a cellular way through the dances.

3. Creative expression stimulated by Biodanza that aided my therapy process

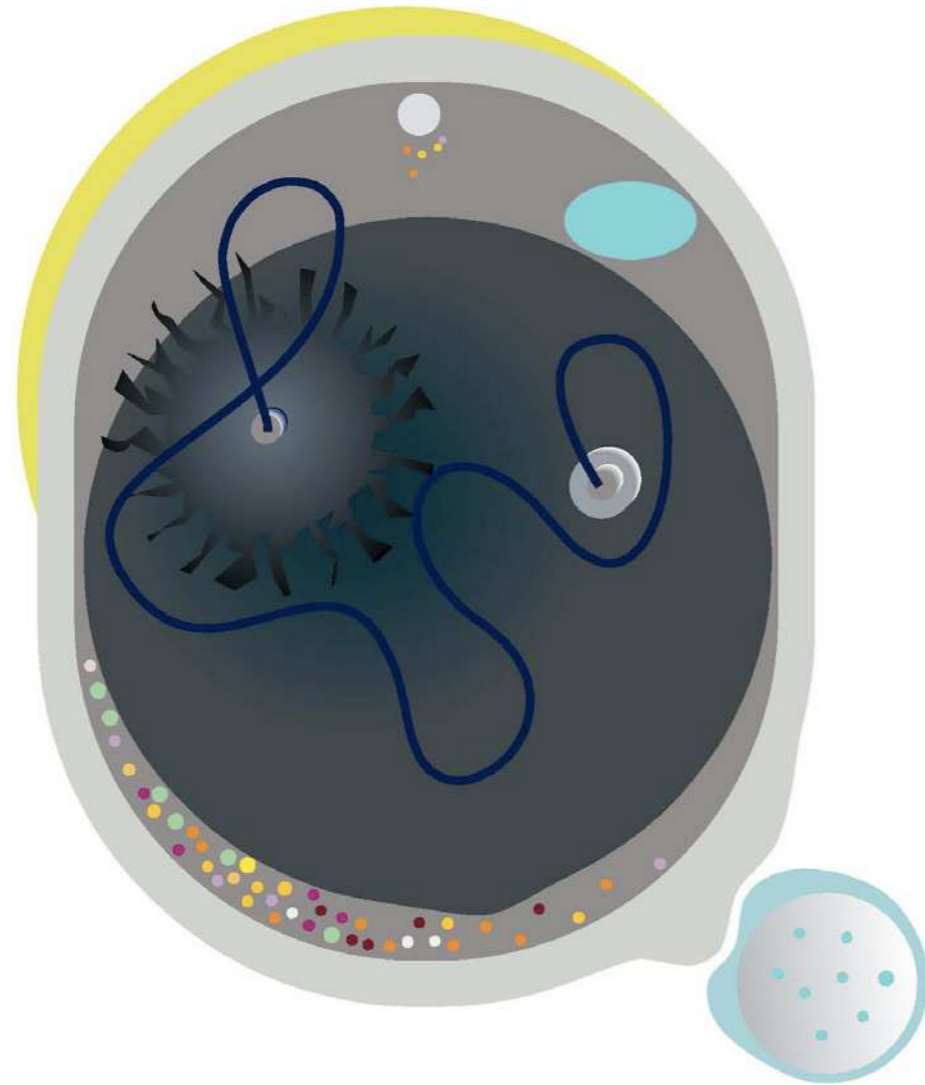
Initially it was impossible to describe in words how Biodanza affected me or how I was “feeling”. I found drawing more useful in being able to describe how I felt, and eventually I developed a way of non-visual journaling that I did regularly for 3 years. These drawings became known as Eggs. Together my therapist and I looked at the Eggs as they told a visual story of the dance of recovery I was experiencing. I will illustrate this part of the Monograph with drawings and ‘Eggs’ from that period.

When an individual is invited to tell their story in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous they are guided to do it in 3 parts.

- 1. How it was** (their personal history and the impact of addiction in their lives)
- 2. What happened** (the turning point that made them want to change)
- 3. How it is now** (the journey of recovery)

It is with this simple guideline in mind, that I tell my story of recovering my life from a place of chaos to a place of serenity and joy.

2 What happened



“We sense something is wrong, we start feeling crazy, but we can’t understand why because we can’t identify the problem.”

Co dependent no more - Melanie Beattie

“The crisis of our times seems a crisis in our way of perceiving, a crisis in our sensitivity.”

Rolando Toro

Dancing like trees

At the end of October 2005, I was taking a walk in Melville with a friend. We passed a cute little church I’d often noticed because of its beautiful, lush garden. There was a photocopied sign stuck on the old wooden gate. It simply said ‘Biodanza’, which wouldn’t have meant anything to me usually, but I’d heard the word about a week before for the first time. An old friend from Yeoville and a constant companion for Friday afternoon drinks had told me about this crazy dance thing he’d done in Troyville, which he thought I might like, he said, since people danced like trees! Perhaps it was something Kate had said in the class he attended. I have yet to make the connection.

We went in, asked if we could watch and were kindly told we couldn’t but we could dance if we liked. Exercise wasn’t a part of my life. I’d been going to a few yoga classes, usually after my evening glass of wine or two... but I couldn’t sustain it. Overwork or one more glass would get in the way. I sometimes took the odd stroll in the neighborhood to abate my concern about sitting behind a computer all day. This particular inactivity and extra calories from the alcohol I was drinking meant that I weighed 90 kg when I walked into that first Biodanza class. Curiosity piqued, we decided to stay and dance. For me that turned out to be a life changing decision. And so much more than simply physical exercise.

Refuge from chaos

There was a supervision going on that night. Kate Clement invited me in, Carolina was there, and Tanya, who was being supervised gave the class. It was magic. Instantly I knew I’d found a refuge from the chaos in my life. This was a place into which I could escape. There was something special going on there and I wanted more. The atmosphere was light and non-judgmental. The teacher giggled and said ahhh - a lot!

I went back every week that November and the two weeks up until the Christmas break. I just arrived and danced. Nobody knew my name or my story. Nobody seemed to mind or care that I got exhausted and struggled through the energetic part of the class, and cried for most of the quieter part. People smiled, held my hand in the circle even though mine was sweating. They looked into my eyes with tenderness and compassion as if they knew what was going on for me. I felt like I was being seen for the first time. I often disappeared so deeply into the music that I didn’t hear Kate giving the enunciation for the next dance, and then I’d panic to try and figure out what was to be done. Tears often welled up, and magically there

always someone there, a hand on my shoulder, a tissue on offer. I didn't imagine I would ever hang out with these guys though. I heard that they went out after class, but I would rush back to my dysfunctional home, shyly ducking out.

I'd only danced for a few weeks when the December holiday break came. The teacher Kate (later to become a cherished friend) had to go to Australia to visit family. And I prepared to go on a long dreamed about holiday to the beautiful island of Zanzibar with my son, my partner, and friends.



Me, putting on a brave face in Zanzibar after the incident. Sad and over weight, my life was about to change radically.

A little background

Before that Zanzibar holiday over Christmas 2005 I was on a knife edge. My business was successful, money was coming in, I had a home I loved, lots of friends, but for a long time I'd known my life was a mess emotionally. I had a feeling of impending doom.

My son was in trouble a lot at school, my partner who was 15 years younger than me seldom worked, smoked marijuana consistently, and I was having my usual 3/4 bottle of wine a night 'to relax'. There was a lot of stress and tension in the "family" dynamics. But conflict terrified me and I had no idea how to change things, or even how to name exactly what was wrong and how we'd got there. I just tried desperately to keep the peace but felt continually confused by what was going on. I couldn't understand how I could give so much, and try so hard, give so much, but have so little love around me. I felt used up and exhausted.

There is a lifetime of stories and experiences leading up to my 'turning point'. But it was **that** fateful and traumatic Boxing Day incident in 2005 that was the catalyst for a major turn around in my life. I'd slowed down my drinking coming up to the holiday to try and get a grip on what was going on in my home. I knew I needed to be present, more aware because things felt chaotic. But I it couldn't have stopped what happened.

Rock Bottom

It's ironic that rock bottom can happen in one of the most beautiful places on earth - Zanzibar. It's also strange that the Boxing day incident really happened to my boyfriend and not to me. But the impact of his overdose and near death plunged me into a space of absolutely despair. I had no idea of the extent of my partner's addiction, but looking back there were many clues. The ensuing drama lasted several hours. The resulting trauma to myself and my son lasted many years. In time I saw it as a gift that helped push me to change my life. It forced me to re-look my patterns in relationships and recognise my codependence. It forced me to look at my own use of alcohol and how it had affected my life up until that point. I knew I had to do something. Urgently.

As I crouched in the back of the beat up Zanzibar combi taxi on that hot tropical evening, breathing my every breath into my young boyfriends lungs, whilst my son monitored each breath going in and out by lying on his back and listening to

“We change our behavior when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing. Consequences give us the pain that motivates us to change.” ”

Henry Cloud

his lungs, I didn't bargain with God, I had long abandoned a sense of God in my life. I felt it was wrong, rude even to pray for help when I didn't pray usually. All I thought was - thank God I can do this - Thank God I'm not drunk. Thank God I listened to that something inside that warned me that life around me was out of control, chaotic and unmanageable and that I should stay sober just in case something happened. I had no idea that something would be the traumatic near death experience of my partner, and the subsequent lying, denial and threats.

As hard as I tried I couldn't enjoy the rest of the holiday. I felt sick with anger, regret, confusion, humiliation, and a sense of absolute doom. My whole world was turning inside out. My biggest regret to this day is that my son was exposed to the whole drama. In retrospect I see that we both suffered post traumatic stress from the incident, and it would take a long time to heal from that and the years of choices that led to it.

Willing to do whatever it takes

Back in Joburg in early January 2006, my close friends heard my story, saw my distress and advised me to get into psychotherapy. Broken and desperate I sought out a counselor who knew about addiction and I waited impatiently for Biodanza to start again for the year.

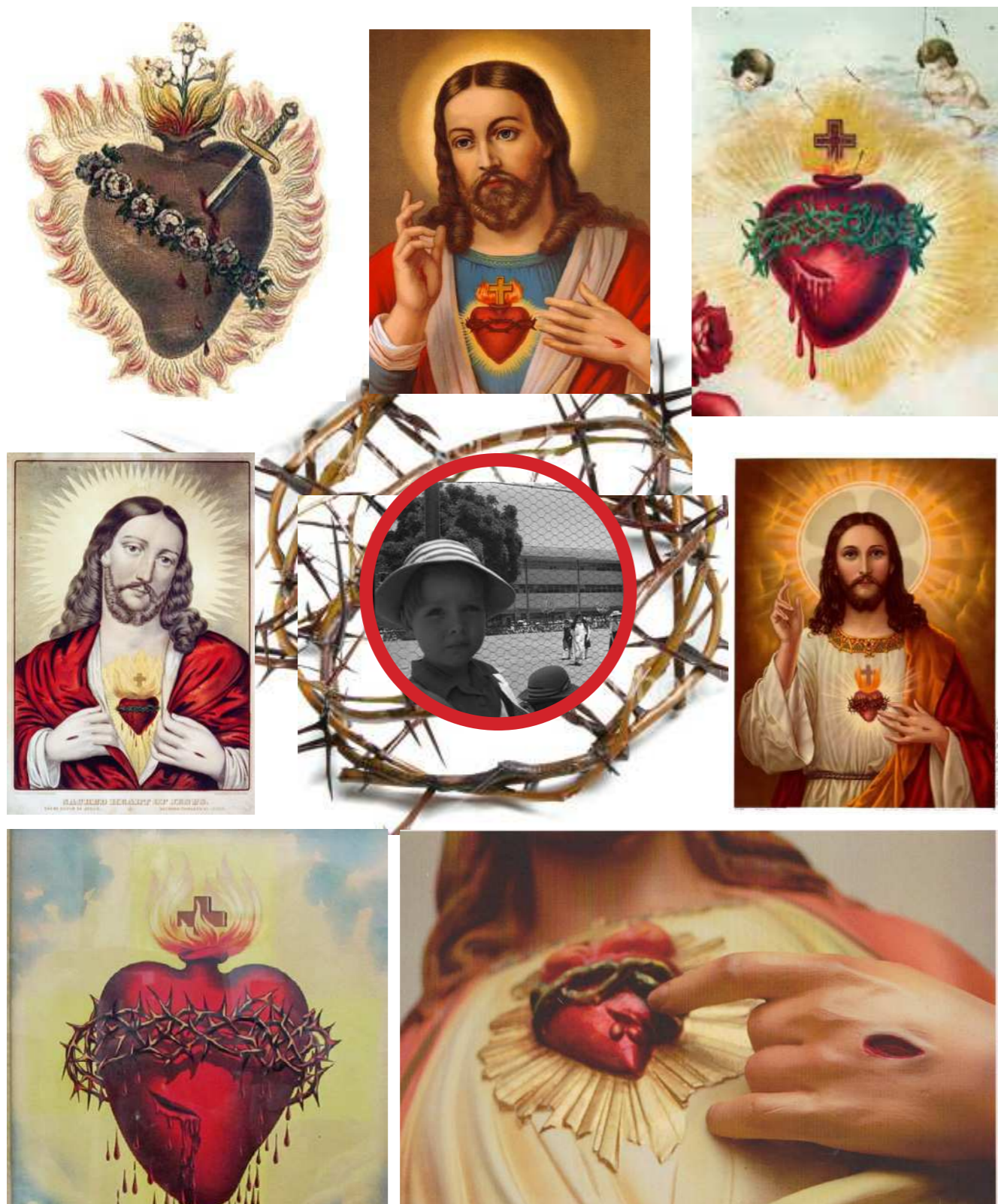
My boyfriend was still living with me and I was going to need as much help as I could get to untangle myself from the mess I was in. I was willing to do whatever it took to get "better". Carolyn Myss talks about spirituality being a Biological need. My energy was totally depleted. I'd lost my power. My being was spiritually toxic. I was co-dependent. I drank more than I wanted to. My being craved something else, something better, but I had no idea at the time what that was, or how it would play out. All I could do is take one step at a time.

So I started to deliver myself to a weekly talking psychotherapy session. I had no idea, or plan or understanding of what had gone wrong and how I could fix it. All I knew is that I needed change. There's a saying in the Recovery world that goes

“When the pain of staying the same is greater than the fear of change - change will occur.”

That's where I was and I was willing to do whatever it took. I had no idea at the time that Biodanza was a healing personal development system. It was just a place to take myself away from the pain of my life at home.

3 How it was - a personal history



Michele and Juliette Dean.

I am the child of a Croatian Mother and Irish Father who met each other in what is now Zimbabwe in 1960. It was during my father's long leave in Dublin, Ireland in 1961 that I was born during the devastating Hurricane Debbie.

I grew up in Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia. This was during the war of Independence, from the age of six months to 17 years. My parents divorced when I was five years old and I've come to understand that issues of abandonment that surfaced throughout my adult life probably stemmed from this time.

Shamefully different

From the age of five and three respectively, my sister and I were sent as unaccompanied minors during childhood holidays between the cities my parents lived in. Harare, Maputo, Cape Town, and Johannesburg. I remember feelings of fear and aloneness from that time. My sister is younger than me and it was my role to look after her on these journeys. I had to cope, but I felt scared, and I felt different from other kids. Nobody else's parents were divorced. No-one else I knew had to travel on their own faraway to see their father.

Fearing my religion

I started school at five at the Dominican Convent in Harare, and spent my entire school life there until my M'levels at 17. By that time teenage rebellion had surfaced and I started investigating everything from boys and booze to Billy Graham. I found tales of Christian oppression in Russia and Gang Land America infinitely more fascinating than the world of nuns and priests I grew up in. My God was frightening and punitive. I was born with original sin according to Catholic doctrine, plus which somebody died for me! On every stairway of our convent school there was a picture of Jesus spurring blood from a pierced heart and an entanglement of thorns digging deep into his head. Apparently my sins had done this! This was the first messaging that I was fundamentally bad. The faith my Father belonged to and cherished filled me with fear and gave me no answers. Penny Catechism was a matter of rote learning and not understanding.

Fearing others in my country

Growing up during the war of independence meant living in a lot of fear and tension, and a good deal of brain washing being a white child with a colonel in the Rhodesian army for a stepfather. However the convent was racially integrated and I found friends amongst all races much to my parents concern.

Adult child

Refuge in substances

My stepfather was an interesting man. He was in many ways, highly influential in my life. An advocate, judge and Colonel in the Rhodesian Army, he was also a jazz lover, hunter, butterfly collector, and an alcoholic. I'm sure I developed a love of music and nature from him. Years later in groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and ACA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) I learned that having a parent as an alcoholic is a major contributor to certain behavior patterns. This coupled with my extreme desire to be seen as worthy by my own father contributed to patterns of people pleasing and co-dependence throughout my adult life.

My childhood was peppered with incidents of drunken behavior that were frightening and dramatic. As a result, I believe I developed a sense of shame connected to my family. In my early teens, I started to run away when drunken drama started. My school friends' families often provided refuge. As I grew older I activity sought refuge in marijuana and alcohol long before any of my peers did. Although I have no doubt I was loved as a child, and that the adults around me were doing the best they could, the incidents I witnessed were disturbing and I came to understand through **psychotherapy** that it was inevitable that I would repeat these learned behaviors later in my life. I didn't really know any other way.

Refuge in art

As a child, art making was a refuge and passion. I drew and painted endlessly and if there was a prize for art at the end of the year I would usually win it. When I wasn't making images I was reading. I often read under the covers by torchlight escaping into fantasy worlds of Magic Faraway trees and Astral traveling. As we prepared to leave Rhodesia I prepared a portfolio to get into art college in Johannesburg. I knew I was leaving to go to school, but I had no idea the whole family was splitting up and that my Mom was leaving the country too.

Refuge in South Africa

Under the guise of me going to art college, my Mom sought refuge - from the new Zimbabwean government and her failing marriage - in South Africa. We left the country along with thousands of other fearful whites. I lost my entire peer group to the rest of the world. My stepfather stayed. I'd grown to love him, even with his drinking problem and once again we were a family torn apart.

Refuge in Religion

I was seventeen when I started art college in Johannesburg with a view to doing fine art. I hated Johannesburg. It was hard, smelly and threatening. I witnessed incidents against people by the apartheid police that made me long to go home. I was lost and unsettled, and I was new in town - my friends were in Canada or Australia or England. The kids at college were way more sophisticated than me. I would walk the city streets after college feeling disconnected and alone.

I eventually hooked up with the first people to recruit me into their circle. Inevitably,

born-again Christians with an interest in saving my misled Catholic soul and showing me the right way. Very appealing for somebody who was already so full of shame, fear and sin. I never met the attendance criteria of art college in the first year. I dropped out after meeting a Jew for Jesus and spending too much time discussing revelations whilst smoking weed. Dropping out of art college blew any chance I had at furthering my education and at 18 I found I had to find a job.

Caring as a job

I enrolled at nursing college as a desperate and easy measure. Without any training I was thrust straight into a trauma ward in the first week. I met people at nursing school but homesickness got the better of me. After six months I had a little money saved from my meager salary I ran away back to Zimbabwe. When I ran out of money I had to come back. I lost my nursing job as a result for taking unauthorised leave.

Losing religion and looking after myself

By now, 19 years old, I found a flat in Johannesburg. The search for "truth" and "acceptance" was slowly failing. Jaded hippies who smoked weed whilst reading the new testament were soon replaced by advertising hipsters who worked long hours with the aid of cocaine and a bottle of wine. I was left with no answers and a void to fill. I knew I couldn't be part of a judgmental system that disqualified anyone who believed anything other than it's own doctrine, that judged me as fundamentally bad before I'd even breathed.

Guilt and a sense of not good enough hung over me. Finding my goodness was a process of rebelling against anything and anyone that towed a single line... "you must be a Christian to be worthwhile" had to be wrong. It went against what I'd experienced of people in life. Losing my religion left me with a hole in my soul and a broken heart. Overwork and self-medication helped ease the pain.

Creativity as a job

Back in Johannesburg I found a job in a small design studio in the city. I continued to work in Ad Agencies and Design Studios for many years, slowly learning the craft of graphic design under mentors who nurtured me. I was very lucky not to have had to have needed a qualification. My portfolio was good enough. In agencies I learned how to work towards the crazy deadlines with the help of a bottle of red wine or a joint. Agency life is notorious for drug taking and drinking, and whilst I always managed to get to work, I often had difficulty getting myself home again after late night brainstorming and drinks in the studio or a restaurant in Sandton City.

Refuge in Bohemia

It took two years before I began to settle down in Johannesburg. I had unwittingly found my self in the hub of a bohemian area called Yeoville. It was an area pumping with nightclubs and coffee bars. A meeting place for politicians and artists of all

Yeoville
family

men



colours and persuasions. I began to feel more at home. I made friends and found a family of sorts in the alternative beings who lived in the area. Filmmakers, artists, musicians, misfits - Yeoville was a creative hub, and suited me perfectly. Here I would make my own life. I felt I belonged. Here I did not have to conform to the standards of white picket fences and marrying men who could "look after me". This life felt more meaningful and less materialistic than the world I'd grown up in. It was simple yet incredibly exciting and rich. Human relationships were what mattered most. I chose good and solid women for friends, and I'm still connected to them today, but I didn't do too well with men.

I chose badly. I had not real criteria or guidelines. I had no desire to get married or have children. It just didn't form part of my imaginary world. Although I had long relationships - mostly too long, I failed to see danger signs early enough. In some it was of abusive controlling behavior, in others it was substance abuse. In a few cases I became the provider and breadwinner. But, I would love on non the less, trying to prove my worthiness and commitment to any lost soul who needed it.

Refuge in parenting

Having a problem with authority, I longed to be independent. I started freelancing for the big advertising agencies from my late twenties. And that also gave me the freedom to look after the child who had appeared in my life. Siphso was born at my Yeoville house but abandoned by his Mother two weeks later. His granny and I jointly looked after him until the age of three, when she went back to the Transkei without him. I raised him as my own child from then on. We had agreed that he needed a mother, and I must have needed a child. The universe had put us together. He is now 25 and is living with his friends in our Yeoville house. He gave me the opportunity to do something I so needed: to love. And to be loved in the unconditional way children do.

Refuge in work

I grew tired of the ad agencies in my thirties, the work, though lucrative, felt meaningless, and the partying was non stop. I did a course in teaching art to children and discovered a post as a graphics design lecturer was available at the same institution. I applied and was hired.

I headed up the Graphic Design Department at the Johannesburg Art Foundation for 5 years. I discovered I found working with young adults extremely rewarding. I found I could connect to them and they trusted me. I could relate to their stories. Very often, they came from broken homes or disadvantaged backgrounds, and like me, art had been their only refuge growing up.

I started my own business Limeblue Design in 1999. But as my business was growing over the next 10 years, my personal life was spiraling into chaos. I had left a 7 year relationship with a grumpy Alcoholic only to get involved with a much younger man with similar habits, no possessions and no real interest in providing for himself.

change

Spiraling down in chaos

As things spun out of control, work and alcohol became my refuge. The relationship was increasingly trying and destructive for myself and my son and generally life was completely chaotic. I had not yet come across the terms co-dependence or healthy boundaries - I simply believed that if you loved someone you gave them everything you had and helped as much as you could - even at your own expense. A lot was about to change. Thankfully complete transformation came out of the chaos and destruction that was my life by the end of 2005.

The dance of Shiva I did in Biodanza in the years to come helped me understand how necessary this destruction was in order for my change to happen. Life could not have brought me to a more perfect place - I was ready for change and I deeply needed healing.

Lord Shiva is god of constant change, god of destruction, end of a particular creation and condition for appearance of a new one.



3 The years of dancing waves

The beginning of a journey (an early experience of biodanza)

*I feel strange and afraid,
I really want to leave but,
I stay
We hold hands and mine sweat,
I worry about it,
We move around to the left
I feel awkward, I don't flow like them,
and, I wish they wouldn't look at me for so long.
I can't avert my eyes from theirs
without a jerk,
when we walk I sweat,
I feel silly and fat,
another walk, and I start to laugh
I love the music, and the smiles
The next dance sets me free,
I'm in a club,
my eyes closed, not a care in the world,
a wild and free, sexy woman,
not someone with a home I dread going back to.
I dance deeper into a place I've forgotten,
perhaps never known,
a place of passion, and love,
of kindness and peace, of soft, gentle touch,
I feel the pain of my reality,
I cry and can't stop,
someone brings me a tissue, another silently comforts,
the dance of getting free, and being me,
has begun.*

“Eight years ago I didn't understand Biodanza - I just knew in my gut that I needed it”

In my first year of Biodanza I simply danced. I understood very little. I had lost my head and heart and the way back was going to take a while. I didn't understand anything except that dancing made me feel better. After classes I'd ask Kate a lot of questions. The answers she gave seemed flaky and vague. Stuff about cellular memory, repairing old wounds and shedding armour. Now it all makes sense (sort of), but eight years ago I didn't understand Biodanza - I just knew in my gut that I needed it, and that Kate could give me more each week and that she would patiently repeat her answers until I got it.

I tried to explain this new thing I was doing to friends but found I couldn't. I'd wave my arms around and was generally met with rolling eyes. It took me years, as Kate will testify, to get a coherent explanation of Biodanza out of me. There were times I thought it was so weird that it must be a cult of some kind. I Googled it more than once but never came up with anything negative about Biodanza no matter where I looked. A good sign!

Carolina Churba Doyle always says Biodanza comes in the back door, slowly working on your life until the evidence of change is apparent inside and out. Often the change is noticed by others first. That's exactly what happened to me.

Finding Weekly Refuge in Biodanza and Psychotherapy

I was desperately searching for something “just for me”. Everything else in my life was for others in a way that stripped me. I paid, I provided, I sought help and answers for the addicts in my life, I fixed things up for everybody else.

Biodanza was my special space, that refuge - and no-one else I knew wanted to share it with me anyway. My relationship wasn't over yet. I was still too terrified to let go, to put up boundaries to protect myself and my son. When I tried there were threats of suicide and I wasn't ready to take the chance.

So once a week I danced and once a week I went to therapy and talked about my toxic co-dependent relationship, about my history, the stress I was under, the reasons I drank, and inevitably about Biodanza. I wrote endless journals processing what we discussed in therapy, and this has helped me record a chronology of key events in those first four years.

In March 2006, six weeks after starting psychotherapy, I started a mindfulness meditation course and thought it was as good a time as any to stop drinking. By July that same year my therapist started discussing the 12 Steps of AA with me. I was highly agitated about

doing stuff that serious alcoholics did. He said it was important to at least understand the Steps. We battled but I was determined to work hard at understanding the concepts.

I was dancing in Biodanza every week, but it's only 8 years later, in looking back that I see how Biodanza and The Step programme have a huge crossover. The concepts are very similar.

In the 12 Step Recovery programme you use your mind and work cognitively with words and concepts, and in Biodanza you work with your body and emotions. Looking back, I see how both Biodanza and The 12 Steps brought me to a place of freedom, serenity and understanding. In the next section I describe the Steps and how I danced them.

LETTING GO TO THE FLOW OF LIFE, LETTING GO OF CONTROL

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addiction and that our lives had become unmanageable. (AA)

In place of addiction read: alcohol, food, relationship, person, outcome, drug or drink.

I looked at Step One and knew there was no doubt my life had become unmanageable - It was the concept of being **powerless** I had a problem with. I started to have a fear that I may need psychotherapy more than I liked the idea of. Being vulnerable was terrifying. I couldn't accept I was powerless. **I thought I was trying to get control over my life** - I had stopped drinking, I was starting to get exercise in Biodanza, and I was in therapy.

Powerlessness sounded like weakness. I was scared of being silly, sick, weak, pathetic, needy, clingy and dependent. I also had to admit that I harbored a constant low grade emotional pain that I couldn't identify, that wouldn't go away, and that I didn't seem able to change. I have always been a coper. If I wasn't in control who would be? Everything would fall apart.

I came to understand that in Recovery admitting to being **powerless** over my addiction means that I am generally not able to control how much I drink. If I said to myself I'd have one glass of wine, I'd inevitably have two. That I'd become powerless over what may happen as a result - the drama, drunk verdriet wailing, the hangover - and in the long term the accumulative effect of being out of sync with myself and my life. I desperately wanted to be in control of my life. I had to admit that I was powerless to control the alcohol and that it inevitably controlled me. I had to agree that not drinking at all freed me from the need to control. I counted every alcohol unit I drank and every calorie I ate for years. **I tried controlling fixing other people who were impacting on my life thinking it would help me.**

I also understood that being powerless over my "addiction" could mean being powerless over my co-dependent relationship. In other words I couldn't control the person I was involved with. I couldn't change their behaviour patterns, substance abuse

or way of treating me. **I could however, take control of my own life by letting go of that person and looking after my own needs.**

Rami Shapiro in "Recovery the Sacred Art: The twelve steps as Spiritual Practice" talks about the paradox :

"The more clearly you realize your lack of control, the more powerless you discover yourself to be. The more powerless you discover yourself to be, the more natural it is for you to be surrendered to God. The more surrendered to God you become, the less you struggle against the flow of life. The less you struggle against the flow of life, the freer you become. Radical powerlessness is radical freedom, liberating you from the need to control the ocean of life and freeing you to learn best how to navigate it"

Rami Shapiro

Making the Biodanza connection

This is what we practice in dances of Fluidity in Biodanza. I was hearing a similar language every week and actively practising what it felt like to let go. My body was used to coping, and to cope I had try and control the circumstances of my life. I was rigid and stiff and tired. Suddenly my body was getting messages that there was another way week after week. I could simply let go. **My body/being got the concept long before I understood it in my head.**

Fluidity is a category of movement contrary to rigidity. The aim of dances of fluidity is to stimulate the vivencia (experience) of integration with the universe. Fluidity is the capacity to allow a continuous flow of energy.

International Biocentric Foundation (Official Catalogue of dances)

In Biodanza I was learning just to be. I didn't need to manage the process. There wasn't wrong or right way. It was just a matter of going slower, feeling myself connected to the space around me, moving through it with ease. The complete opposite to what I knew to be life's experience. I was always striving to control.

When I went to Biodanza nothing else mattered. The low grade pain was forgotten whilst I danced amongst strangers who didn't know my struggle, who accepted me as I was. Thoughts and feelings came, washed over me and changed. I got through by just dancing with them.

"Life goes on, and at last we are free to live it rather than doomed to try and control it!" *Rami Shapiro*

Biodanza became a language I could use in therapy when I couldn't articulate or access my feelings. I was constantly referring to the dances, using them as metaphors to explain a process or feeling to my therapist.

dances
of life

I came to believe I was powerless over my addiction (replace alcohol, craving a person, outcome, food, drug or drink) and that life was better when I wasn't having to manage or control it - I could simply and fluidly attempt to navigate it. Slowly as the weeks with no alcohol passed I stopped feeling it was boring not to drink and started to enjoy the process of self discovery. Each week on Tuesday evening I danced in the little hall in Melville, and each Thursday morning I talked about the co-dependence, addiction and emptiness in my life. And the dreaded Steps.

Also, please understand that I was grabbing onto what ever help I could. The reason I am telling this story as a parallel experience is because that's how it happened for me. That's how I got better. To mention my Biodanza story without Psychotherapy or Steps wouldn't be true and vice-versa.

Finding vitality, balance and space through the dance of life

In my first year there were some dances and concepts Kate taught linked to lines of vivencia that made an enormous impact. They were:

Walks: Finding balance in my body was difficult at first. I couldn't get the opposite arm, opposite leg thing. The idea that I needed balance in my life was new.

Dances of making space: Opening a space for MY LIFE. Finding a way through the clutter and making room for me! No more co-dependent miss people pleaser. Once a week at least!

Liberation of movement and dances of vitality: I couldn't move much when I started. I was 35kg over weight and sluggish. I've never done sport in my life, even as a child and as an adult I worked at a computer and sat in a chair all day. In time as the weight dropped off me, I experienced sensations of flying, of being totally free, of expression from deep within that had only ever come out at parties, albeit self consciously. Here my way was okay.

Rolling on the floor: Liberating and crazy - I found my fear released into freedom to be me. Rolling around luxuriously, feeling my sensuality, I felt totally risqué at a time in my life when any sense of myself as a sensual being had been hammered.

Shiva: On one foot I learned that even with the chaos going on around me - I could find my center. I became balanced and weightless, a whirl of speed, elegant motion and creativity making a new life out of the destruction around me. The center of my being became connected with energy that transformed as is stayed anchored. **The God in me became the power at the center of my life.** Kate's focused and fierce demonstration of this dance will stay with me forever.

Maximum extension: I came to see how I could dare to extend myself into a new space in my life. A place of serenity and joy. The maximum extension dance sometimes felt like longing in action. Yearning for something new.

Saying no: The word Boundaries again and Limits. These were things to keep me out. My therapist was talking about them and so was Kate. This extremely strong dance of

Kate, Cane, Iks, Slavena, Cathy, Caroline, Jaques, Michael, Anita, Rozanne and many others that came and danced.



stopping and shouting 'No!' with crossed arms, gave me the power to take the radical steps needed to take my life into a more joyful, peaceful place.

Yin - sensitive hands: Kate enunciated this dance in a way that guided us to visual our lives as precious silver ball. That dance had a profound effect on my sense of being, on my identity. The idea that my life needed looking after BY ME.

THE BIODANZA GROUP THAT RESTORED ME TO SANITY

Step 2 - We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step 2 asked me to find a 'Higher Power'. But the concept of having to have the help of a God of any kind made me angry. I really struggled with the concept of spirituality and found it difficult to discuss. I was also angry that I didn't have a Higher Power - even though I'd deliberately rejected my religion. For many years I had made a deliberate attempt to get rid of the Christian image of man in the sky, but I hadn't replaced it with anything. Religion had never managed to fill the hole in my soul. Religion separated me from love. Religion judged me. People did evil and cruel things in the name of Religion. I was against it for many reasons and now I was being asked to come up with a God or Power that could restore me to sanity. (And not believe I could do it myself!) I admired people with faith and told them so. I was jaded and cynical, empty and broken and needing to fill that space. But I wasn't going to do it with the judgmental, terrifying and cruel God from my Catholic youth.

I fought with my therapist and threw the Step 2 work sheets back at him marked with my cheeky answers. Thankfully, he said I could deal with God more in Step 3. All I needed to worry about now was being **restored to sanity and finding something (a higher power) bigger than me. At that time my ego dominated as I believed I was different and separate from others, that no-one understood, and thus, in some way I was special, even if it was negativity special.**

The Step 2 work sheet suggested that the AA Group could be a "Power greater than myself". But I wasn't in AA. My therapist certainly felt all knowing and powerful and he probably held that role for a long while. The Step 2 work sheet went on to explain:

The group works like a family. The group process is founded in love and trust. All members share their experiences, strengths and hopes in an attempt to help themselves and others. There is an atmosphere of anonymity. What you in the group is confidential.

AA Step 2 work sheet

This sounded exactly like my Biodanza group!

The group

The ecological person.
No man is an island. The idea that “the group is a matrix of rebirth in which every participant finds love and acceptance, and permission to change” Learning tolerance and acceptance.

Rolando Toro

The group acts as a mirror reflecting you to yourself. The group members will help you discover the truth about who and what you are...

AA Step 2 work sheet

Rolando Toro talked about the Biodanza group being:

A Bio-generator - a center that generates life. The concentration of energy converging in the group produces a potential that is greater than the sum of its parts. The biological energy of renovation works with the unity and harmony of the organism. In this way it creates a magnetic field in which the group can reflect and project emotions, desires and physical sensations of great intensity.

Rolando Toro

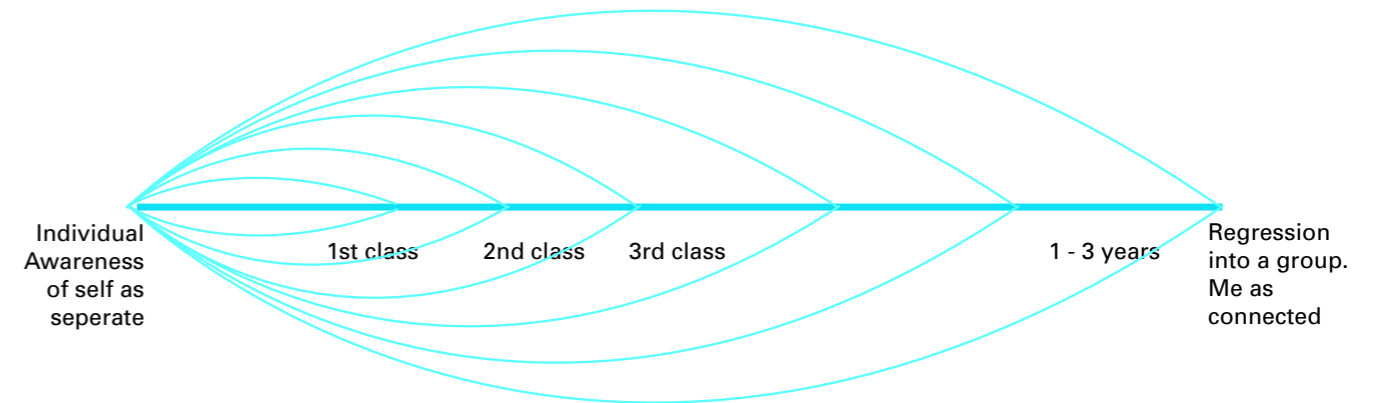
The relationship with the other is simultaneous with the discovery of one’s own identity.

Rolando Toro

It was only as I was writing this monograph that I made the connection between the words of the Recovery Step Worksheet and Rolando Toro’s explanation of the Bio-generator. I felt instantly overwhelmed by a feeling of protection. As if a higher power that I couldn’t feel or access eight years ago, had put me exactly where I needed to be - into a group of dancers and life-workers, with a wise and beautiful teacher in Kate Clement who would create experiences with dances and music that would work to restore and regenerate my life.

The Biodanza group would appear to be, by its specialised nature, a fragment of universal and unconscious forms of human relationship. And in this sense, there is neither the chance for passivity in the encounter nor for possessive love. It is like opening to innocent and universal love.

Rolando Toro



The ego teaches us... that who I am is separate from everyone else. Ego believes that I am separate from God, from everyone else and from the things I want for my life.

(Wayne Dyer)

Biodanza brought me to a place where I saw myself as part of others, as part of “spirit/Life - guided by it, and as part of nature, able to have anything I need. And as having enough. I’ve come to believe I come from the same source as everything else.

THE BIODANZA GROUP AS A BRIDGE FROM MY IDENTITY AS ADDICT TO ONE OF DANCER OF LIFE

I had been dancing nearly a year. Things were still rough in my relationship but I had my group. I started to go out with them for pizza after class. Even when they heard my story they still liked me. Further more there was seldom anyone drinking. I had found a new peer group. New friends. Just as my therapist said I would. And I hadn’t even done it deliberately.

I did an addiction counseling course a year later and discovered that finding a new peer group is one of 4 key factors to keeping an addict clean. In the Recovery world the daily and weekly AA and NA meetings, and people one meets there can provide these factors. I went to meetings and took on the identity of an “addict” long enough to grasp the key concepts of sobriety, and the vital role Step Work has in keeping someone clean, but it was in Biodanza I found real connection and empathy, without my identity as an addict/alcoholic ever being an issue or feature.

A year in, the things Kate was saying in class and the dances we were doing were having an impact, I honestly couldn’t make sense of most of it, and couldn’t remember a class from week to week. The enunciations washed over me in clouds of concepts about inner joy, connection, cellular memory, cosmos, transcendence, vivencia and affectivity. The words were foreign and more esoteric than I was used to, but it didn’t matter, I just danced and the feelings moved inside me.

Dances of recovery and restoration in the first year

I had lost a sense of who I was. Perhaps I hadn’t ever known. Certainly my potential was stunted and trapped before Biodanza and recovery. Many dances worked towards me rediscovering myself rebuilding my identity. I discovered my sensuality, creativity and eventually spirituality, through the dance.

Fire: We danced fire dances that took my breath away and left me weeping on the floor. To be restored I needed to let go of old ways and do things differently. I needed to go through the fire and allow it to totally melt me before I could transform. Fire

The smile and look are the keys of the inner bond. Rolando Toro

dances of life

At times the group has a deflagrating quality. That is to say, it precipitates and process of growth. The experince is lived with great intensity and has the character of a moving self-discovery. Certain aspects of the identity that have been hidden can subtly reveal themselves.

Rolando Toro



also allowed me to express my sensuality. A fellow participant Jacques called me fire-lady - I didn't know she existed until then. Somehow my suppressed sexuality found expression - especially when dancing with Jacques.

Tiger: Kate often demonstrated "putting on our tiger skin" - a metaphor for giving oneself a protective layer of confidence and strength before stepping out into the world. I've used this many times in real life, before going to a tricky meeting, before a potentially difficult encounter.

Harmonic opposition: This fundamental exercise in a new way of communicating helped me redefine my fear of conflict and arguments. Standing my ground sometimes, sometimes letting the other have their say, it wasn't necessary that there be winner or loser in a conflict, nor was there a necessity for hurt, destruction and mayhem..

Affectivity and caress: My group held me over and over again with great tenderness and care. They accepted me with love. I am forever grateful.

I was experiencing connection, forming new relationships from a place of sobriety. Towards the end of the year there was talk of going to the **African Encounter** and I knew that I wanted to, no, needed to go. But I didn't realise how far from ready I was. Kate tried to prepare me by sending me to Carolina's advanced Thursday class.

Kate came with me. I can't remember what happed exactly but there was a LOT of connection and fluidity. In the car afterwards I was reeling. Kate said not to think about it for two days! I didn't. I didn't think about it, analyze it or try and figure it out.

I felt it strongly though, and shortly afterwards, I presented my therapist with the drawings below. I wanted to share Biodanza with him. It was so difficult to talk about the dances or my feelings about anything, I tried to convey a little of how I felt through the images. **Biodanza was triggering a non-verbal creative expression in a place I was still struggling to find words.**

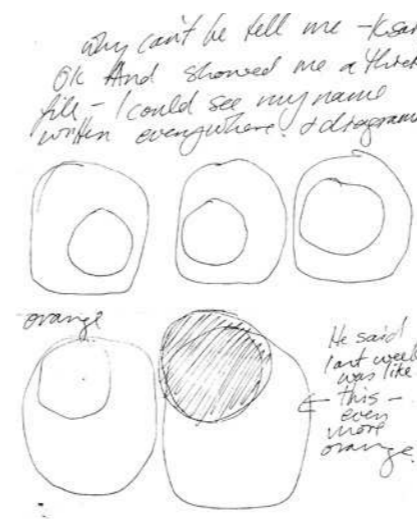


“ the language of Biodanza is a language of feelings, not of the head.”

Rolando Toro

“ the work of creation is always the expressive result of the act of living.”

Rolando Toro

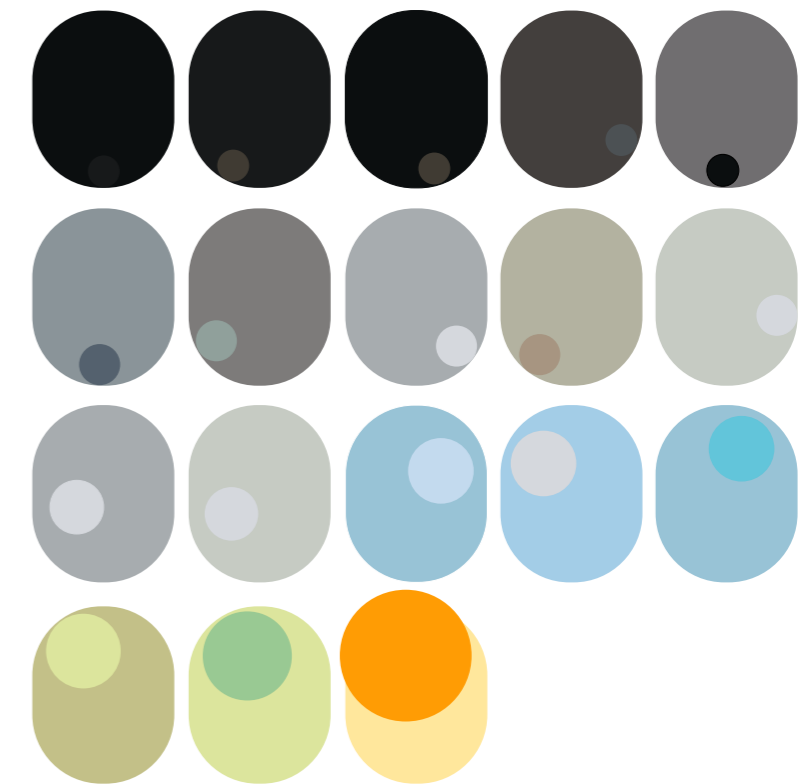


DANCING ON PAPER

I had been doing Biodanza for exactly a year in November 2006 when I had a dream that started another creative, non-verbal internal process. The talking in therapy didn't always work for me. I found it difficult to talk about my feelings. I tended to talk in pictures and metaphors. I'd solve problems the same way, drawing mind maps and diagrammes to understand difficult concepts. One night I dreamed that I asked my therapist how I was doing. He said he couldn't tell me but that he could show me. He drew a diagramme and said it showed clearly how I was doing:

The drawing showed egg shapes with a dot inside them that represented me. In the last egg I was bigger and had started to emerge. He said it showed I was getting better.

In Biodanza too, I was starting to "come out of my shell". I was emerging. The Diagramme was a visual expression of where I was in the dance process. The following day I decided to draw the diagramme from the dream on my computer. This started a daily practice of non-verbal creative journaling. **It was the only way I could really express what was going on inside me.** I tried to only use abstract symbols, although later some recognisable elements emerged. I only had one rule - and that was to never go back an edit an egg. Once it was done it was done. **Biodanza soon emerged as a symbol in the eggs and its power of transformation in my life.**



I always had the sense that there was a level of woundedness that you experienced that traditional talking therapy struggled to access.

Kenneth Wilson, in an interview about the work of Biodanza in my life

I took my therapist by surprise with my first presentation of eggs diagrammes - a look at the week of my feelings through my eyes. He agreed I could keep bringing them and that we could talk about them. **I believe the dances opened up feelings that I wanted to share, and since I couldn't exactly dance the feelings for him for him I could do dance on paper.**

Creativity is a natural function of life, the biological expression of overabundance.

Rolando Toro

What was going on for me had to come out through creative expression. I had no control over it. Biodanza had opened a floodgate of emotion that was expressing through my body, and as a graphic designer, the natural flow was to put it down visually on paper.

RADICALISING MY BIODANZA EXPERIENCE

The Encounter at the Nest Dec 2006

I had just started the Eggs in November and so when I had to leave for the Biodanza Encounter at the Nest on 15th December - there was no question about it - my computer was coming so that I could continue doing the diagrammes daily.

My boyfriend and brand new car were also tagging along. It was a sign of how stuck I still was in the relationship. I arranged a cottage nearby for my boyfriend to stay in and he drove us down in my new Rav 4. I wasn't even the first one to drive it!

I shared a room with Cathy and Slavena, and being just with them was such a relief although there was still that gnawing feeling that I should be with him. Some evenings after the vivencia I did leave and go and stay where he was, only to be grilled endlessly about what we were doing.

Biodanza is such a private journey. I was in a deep process of rebuilding my identity but there was still this heavy co-dependent relationship clinging to me by an umbilical cord. It soon would get cut.

Profound shifts in the dance

The days of dancing were spectacular - I lapped up what I could and in particular I remember a dance of fluidity with Kate that became a dance of regression into the whole group. Kate approached me and started to flow into the spaces in between my arm and body, her arms over my head, and through my legs, we were flowing in pure synchronicity, over, under, between, smoothly brushing over each others bodies never getting stuck or bumping each other. After a while we parted to flow through the hall into the space between a 100 other participants. I felt like I was in heaven. Nothing else mattered. This bliss, this tumbleweed of humanity moving together with love was all I needed, all I wanted, and all that mattered. Something changed in me after that. I became connected to Kate in a way that can't be broken. I felt what it was like to be part of a whole.

boundary
as
protection

The biggest NO was from Biodanza!

But back at the cottage up the hill from the Nest hotel there was still a problem. Jealously, blaming, spitefulness, spying.... I felt I had better try and include my boyfriend to dispel his fears. Although full of fear myself, I asked Kate if he could come to the braai we were all having on Saturday afternoon. She said she's asked Carolina but she looked doubtful. Neither of them have ever said anything but I think they colluded on this.

Carolina met with me. I was nervous and quite terrified of her. She said NoOOO - in that way only Carolina can. What does he want here? No-this is your space. **No - this is your process! This is your life!** I barely knew this woman, but Whamo - she was standing up for me! She knew I couldn't do it myself. I still didn't care for myself enough. But that NO was one of the biggest lessons of my life. Of course I was embarrassed I'd even asked, but I was also so very relieved.

Thank you Kate and Carolina.

In another two weeks he would be out of my home, and a few months later out of my life forever. The following Eggs diagrammes I did at the Encounter and just after show how the POWER of Biodanza helped to give me strength to fight for my life. To get free. To say NO! I deserve more. I deserve love.

Bionanza's approach to creativity is that it should come from inside, to bridge the gap between the formal approach and a vivencia's approach to art. I had not intended to make 'art-works' as such. When I look at the body of work I produced over the next three years they showed deep expression from inside. I listened to music when I made them, and went into a vivencial state in order to access what was going on inside me. If I could draw them I could show my therapist. Many of the Eggs looked beautiful. Over time they became a movie, an animation of sorts. I liked them although sometimes they were painful to create.

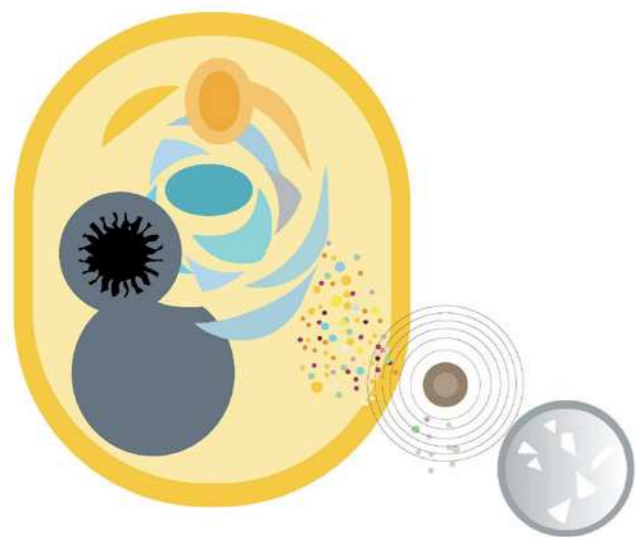
Eggs, embryo's transforming into life

Over the following 4 pages I've showed only a few of the original Egg diagrammes. There are in total 367 done over 3 years so it's impossible to show them all here. These ones illustrate clearly the trauma I was going through during the first Encounter, and the part Biodanza played in helping me get free. I danced every day and then expressed the emotions through the Eggs. The power to say NO was emerging as a force of love. A large swirling force originating in the dance. A sense of connection and strength I got from being with my companions, a sense of validation and self esteem, a sense of unity. I could do this. I was not alone.

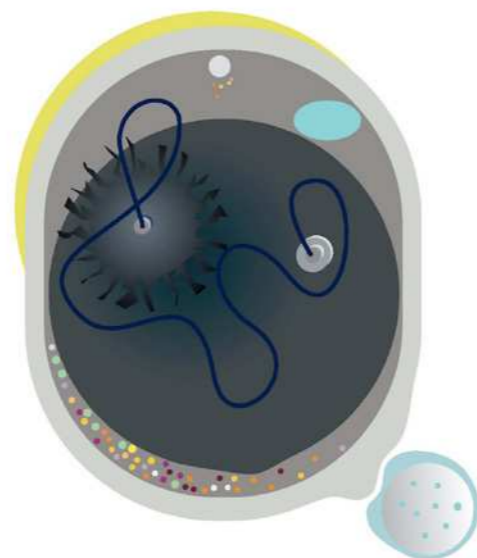
In Biodanza creativity is stimulated by means of the radicalisation of vivencia prior to the creative act. Creation emerges from vivencias induced by music, dance, contact, ergotism and the experience of the marvellous.

Rolando Toro

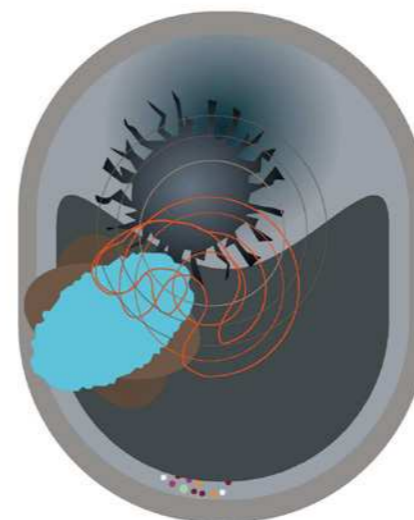
dances
of life



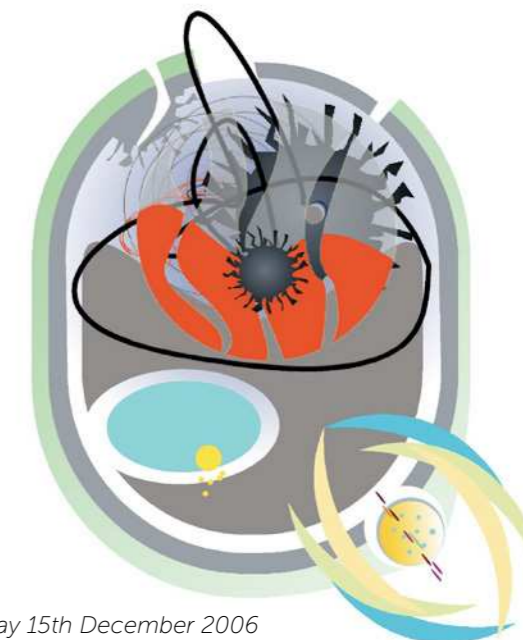
Saturday 2nd December 2006



Friday 8th December 2006

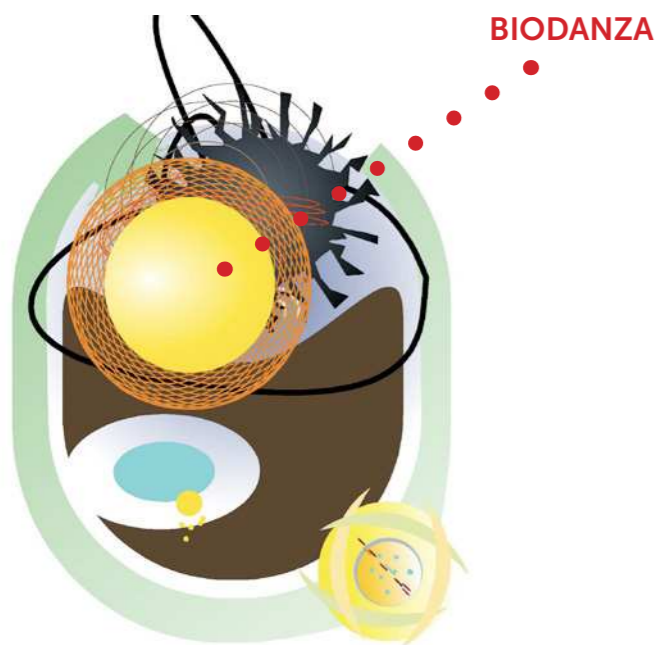


Monday 11th December 2006



Friday 15th December 2006

The above Egg Diagrammes show the emotional state I was in before the Biodanza Encounter 2006. They are diagrammes of dances going on inside myself. I will show in the presentation what each Egg represents and symbolises... eg:the spikey black object is the bad relationship.



Saturday 16th December 2006



Sunday/Monday 17th/18th December 2006



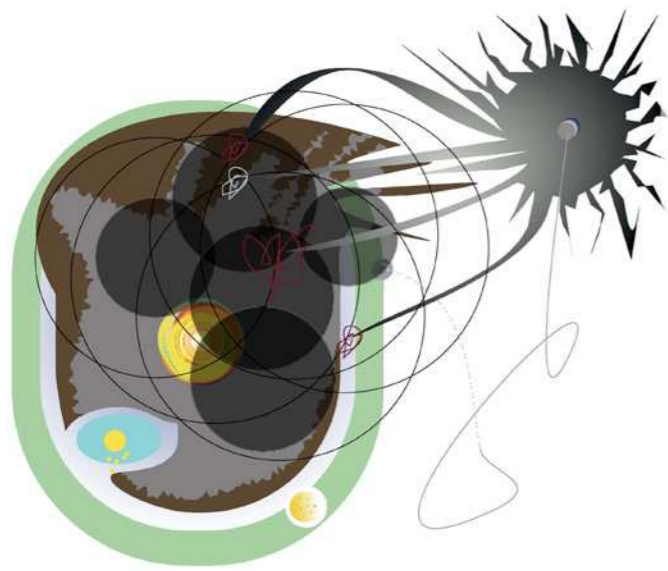
Tuesday 19th December 2006



Thursday 20th December 2006

These Eggs show the appearance of a Biodanza symbol-the large spinning golden circle. Notice how it pushes the negative spikey object out of my being. There are many lines spinning like a protective integrated community

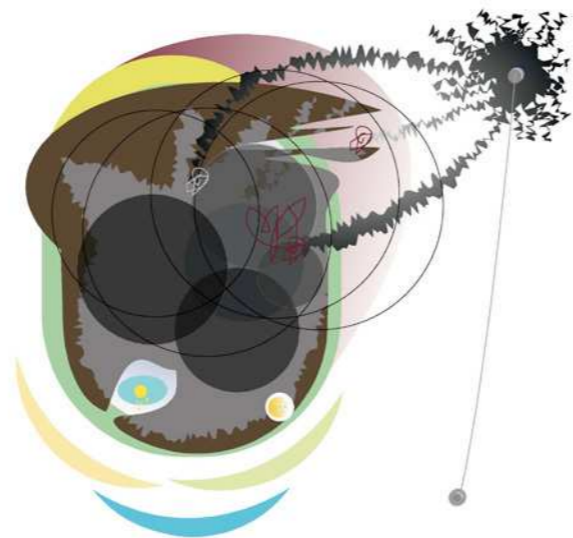
At the time I had no idea of the work Biodanza was doing. It's only in looking back over these eggs that I see the visual representation of the healing that was taking place.



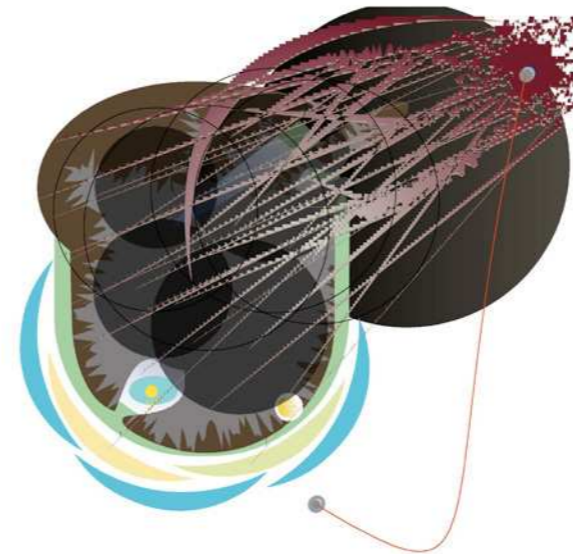
21st - 27th December 2006

A trauma everyday

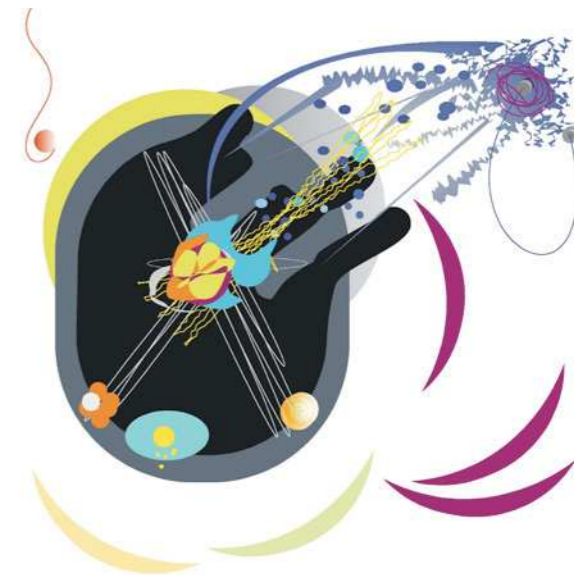
It was January 2007, there was no Biodanza -but it was deep inside of me. These Eggs show how hard it was to get free. But eventually with Therapy and Biodanza I did.



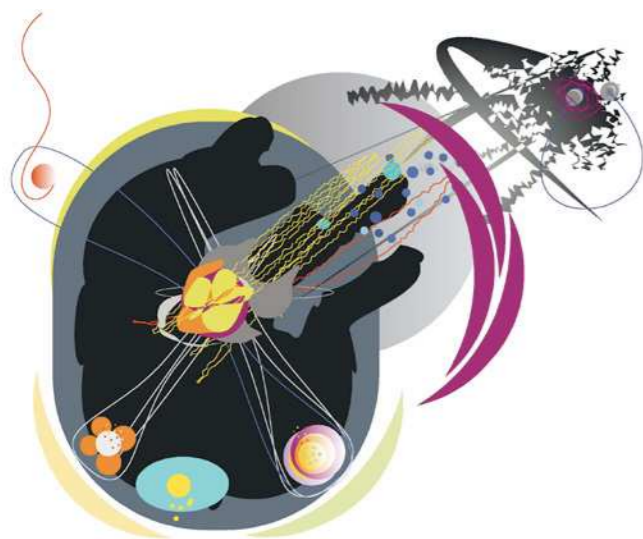
January 2007



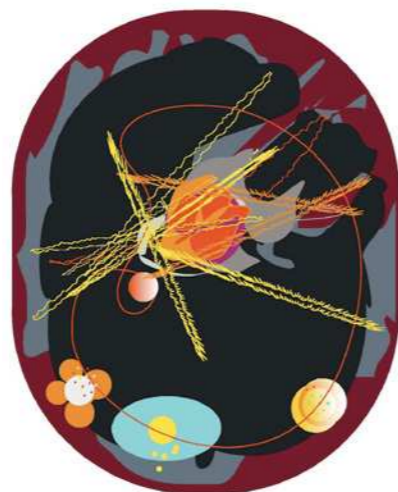
Thursday 4th January 2007



Thursday 11th January 2007

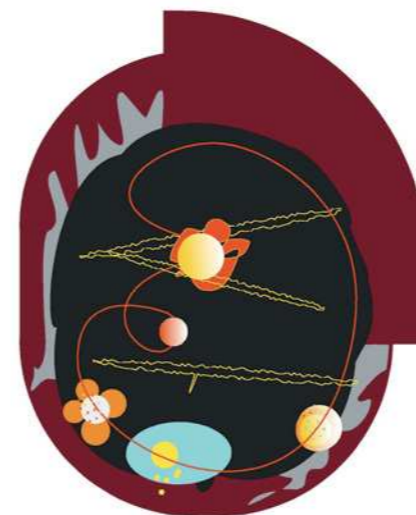


Saturday 13th January 2007



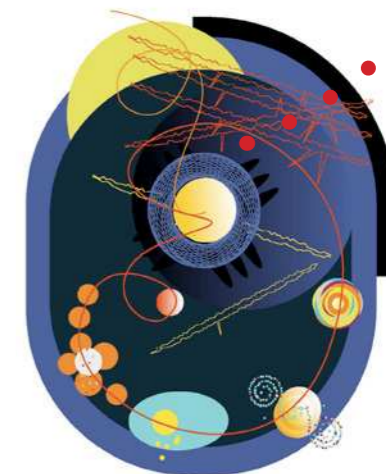
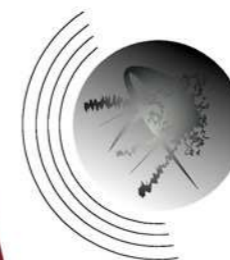
Sunday 14th January 2007

Finally it's finished



Tuesday 16th January 2007

Putting up a boundary

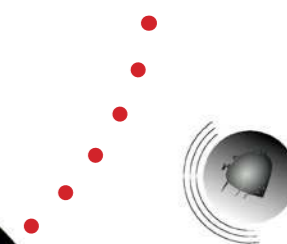


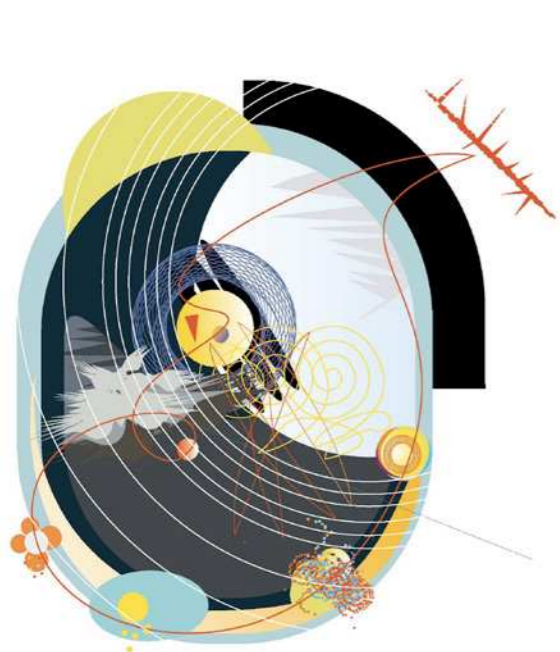
Tuesday 16th January 2007

Putting up a boundary

Biodanza had started again - the symbol for Biodanza was back, protecting my core. He was gone. I was safe.

BIODANZA

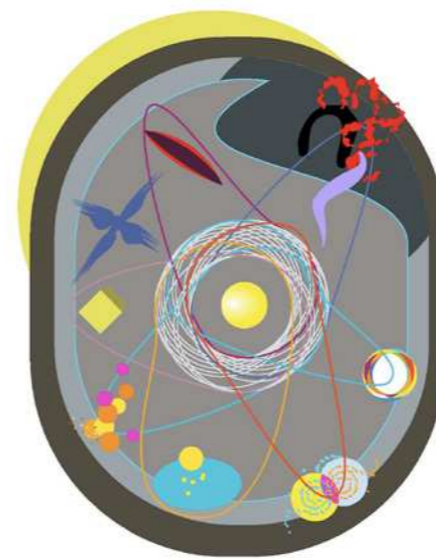




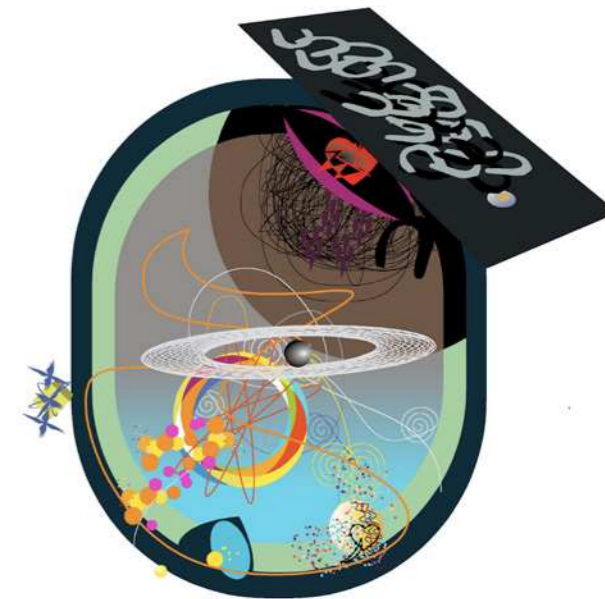
Saturday 27th January 2007



Friday 2nd February 2007

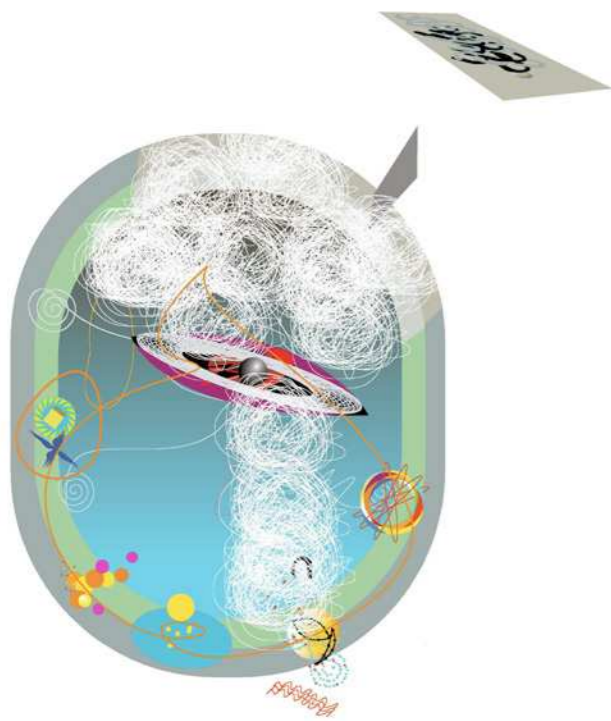


Thursday 8th February 2007



Monday 17th February 2007

The eggs started to look more serene, and Biodanza stayed protecting my core whether I was having a sad or good day.



Wednesday 20th February 2007



Monday 26th February 2007

Connection



Dancing the waves

Life started to settle down. Biodanza was a source of companionship and strength. It helped me feel held together. Loved. But it wasn't instant or all the time. My therapist let me bring my eggs, dances, poems, stories and drawings. Offerings of love. Offerings I hadn't been able to make as a child. We talked through and analyzed each creative offering. I was longing for love in my life, but I was overwhelmed with feelings of not being good enough.

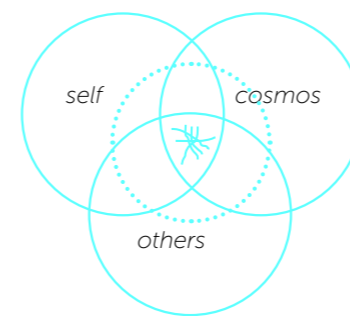
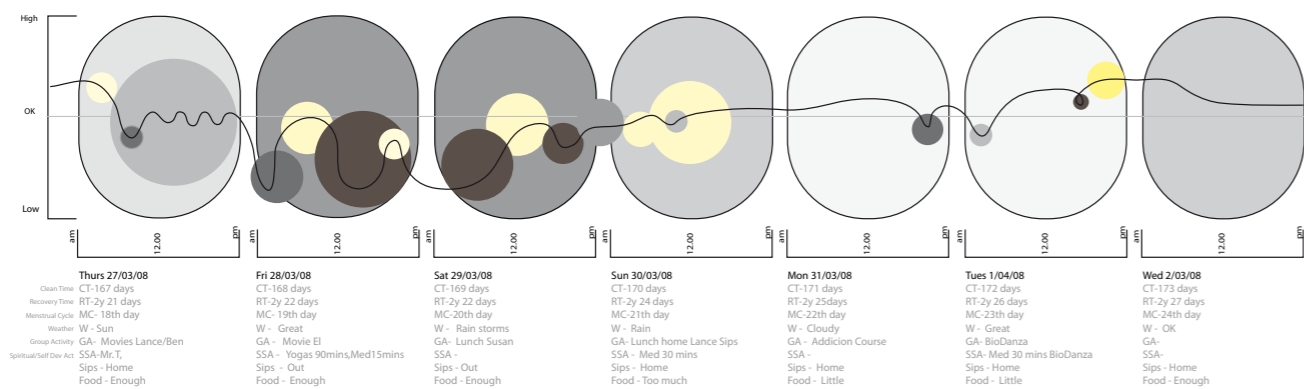
I know now that the deep longing for love comes from unmet needs in childhood. Needing love, attention, approval and acceptance. I started to fall in and out of waves of sad feelings. **Waves would wash over me in a Biodanza class, sitting at my computer doing the daily Egg or hearing background music in a store. I was learning to ride the waves, to dance the waves without any distraction or numbing techniques.** For the first time in my life, I was really feeling. It was overwhelming at times. It was essential for me to dance, to create Eggs, and to talk to my therapist. I was learning to live with my feelings of inadequacy and longing, without alcohol or a destructive, all consuming relationship to distract me. All I could do was live one day at a time as the Recovery jargon says, I was learning to "live Life on Life's terms", dance my feelings, make eggs of them and hope that one day they'd settle down. The process was really one of finding something to fill the void inside. That space of self love that is my essence. My connection to spirit.

We could say that we lose sanctity, we lack God - the inner God of compassion and tenderness.

Transcendence is not only ecstasy with nature, but the encircling energy that unites us with love. Such is the vivencia of divinity. We lack the God within. Many look outside for God, but God is our sense of compassion and tenderness. *Rolando Toro*

There were weeks during the sad period that I was so perplexed with what was making me sad that I did a weekly graph of my feelings - mapping them against daily events. Notice on Tuesdays, after Biodanza day my mood is elevated.

WAVE PATTERN EXPLORATION 3rd week



The 3 Elements Biodanza works - with Life at the centre

TURNING MYSELF TO A CONNECTION WITH LIFE OVER - TRANSCENDING INTO TRUST

Step 3 - Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him

I wrote on my Step 3 Worksheet: I have no God of understanding. God for me was an infinitely absent landlord. What I wished for was different. I believed that since there is no proof of God, God as a belief required faith - therefore God is the fabrication of man's desire or need to believe.

I had no faith and no desire to believe in a God. If I was going to Recover I needed to have a Higher Power and I despaired of one. I couldn't pray without seeing a man in the sky, and instantly feeling not good enough and afraid. But thankfully, I learned that **Step 2** says ...WE CAME TO BELIEVE... In other words, I could take sometime about it.

Trust has always been major issue in my life. In Biodanza I didn't need to talk. And yet people seemed to see me. Really see me. There was kindness, warmth and affection, and in the eyes of others, unconditional acceptance. Acceptance for that little girl who isn't bad. Yes she's different, rebellious, independently minded, determined to find her own answers even if it means disapproval of family, but she isn't bad. This has been my life struggle, with my family and with men. I chose men who couldn't appreciate who I am and then I would go out of my way to try and please them, to try and prove that I'm lovable and worthy of love in return.

Each week I put myself in Kate 'sand the group's hands. I continued psychotherapy weekly and hoped for the best. Both Biodanza and Psychotherapy were bigger than me, they both became my Higher Power in a sense. Both gave me something I could trust, something that supported me, made me feel cared for and seen, and offered a way out of the mire I was in. If I could just let go and listen with my body and soul to the new knowledge I was being offered.

Over years of dancing I've understood and embraced the Biodanza view that:

Life at the center of everything - this is the Biocentric principle. The universe exists so that life can exist. Life is the organising principle of the universe. We can put life first in our life choices. We can chose to enjoy life, respect life, love and be loved, touch, and create. Biodanza emphasises that life should be a living experience. Life is sacred and should be protected at all cost. *Rolando Toro*

I think I've always known this, but I couldn't put it into words and didn't feel I had permission to. It would make me bad, or an atheist or something. I made a decision

to turn myself over to LIFE.

“Life is at the centre of Biodanza.

Life as a force. As as it originated. Every atom and particle emitted when life started is a part of us now. All the elements created are the precursors of life.”

What keeps me and the Universe alive is the same Life force. Biodanza connected me to my place in the Universe. Overtime, I stopped feeling like a lost, sinful, unworthy child, and began to feel like I was made with the same delicacy as a leaf on a tree, a drop in the ocean, a tear on a baby's face. And that my life is as sacred and as precious.

The biocentric principle: Life is sacred

Biodanza seeks to bring a sense of sacred back into our everyday lives. Currently a sense of sacred is reserved for obsessive (religious) rituals only. There is a dissociation between sacred and profane (meaning: secular, even opposed to sacred or religion originally, irreligious) in religion that must be questioned. Biodanza considers that life itself is sacred by being the most splendid expansion of the cosmos.

This is central to Biodanza and differentiates it from religions or psychology. In the dances, which are considered sacred, a space is created that is filled with meaning and power.

These dances can vary from chaotic to mandala like. In Biodanza, people connect through dances of love and re-establish a cosmic sense (regression) that integrates them to the whole.

To experience life as awesome splendour, unbearable beauty, and voluptuous harmony, and to feel so intensely alive is undoubtedly a mystical experience. The sacredness of human beings is what gives their life, their love, their sexuality and their creations the quality of

Transcendence is the ability to go beyond yourself and identify yourself with the cosmic totality. An ability to experience states of expanded consciousness.

Maria Lucia Pessoa Santos

transcendence. Sacredness occurs in any circumstance in which life is present. The whole of life is sacred.

A non religious concept of the Divine

Rolando suggested that the perception of divine essence does not require faith.

Each of us can have access to a divine experience if we feel we are part of the whole. For this we need to abolish the ego which keeps us in exile.

Divine experience does not consist of an encounter between the identity of the individual and the identity of a god, but in the very identification of the divine essence which is life. So many dances bring us gently into contact with others. Enact a need a wish or dream we have for life. We dance and make it real, Our body starts to believe in the possibility of being supported.

Biodanza gave me faith. It gave me permission to have a Higher Power that wasn't a guy in the sky that would find me lacking, no matter how well I lived or loved. It allowed me to fall deep into the eyes of another and see my own soul and know that it was good. It allowed me to look into the branches of a tree and find myself, it allowed me to fall to the earth in absolute thanks and reverence for the gift of life. Dances of transcendence opened my heart to the Universe, and gave me faith that I am connected to everything and everybody and that I will indeed live forever.

Angel: Having unconditional support whilst I explored my inner reality and expressed it through my "wings" was unlike anything I'd ever felt. There was no intrusion. Just support. The others arms gently mimicking mine from behind. A sense that there's something - an energy that is with me in my life journey.

Dance of Trust: At the Encounter where Phillipe was the facilitator I had a profound dance with Shumi. We were to collapse backwards into the arms of another. Trusting we would be caught.

Choir of the divine cane: On a school weekend at Christos's house we moved outside under a tree. Singing from the centre of my heart I experienced becoming one with my group, with the leaves, and the light that shone through. A sense of profound connection with nature.

Looking in another's eye's: Every time I've dance in a circle of eyes there's been a moment or more of extreme belonging, of being one with this species, of being made of the same stuff, each with our own stories. I've always been amazed at how many kinds of eyes there are. How creation is so incredibly divine and beautiful.

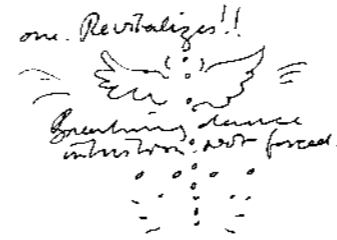
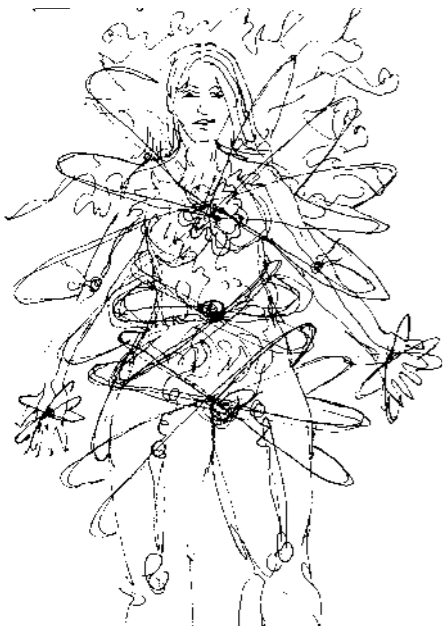


The stars are to the cosmos as cells are to the living world

dances
of life

DANCING IN THERAPY

Kate's classes and dances had a profound effect on me. I wanted to share the experience with my therapist so I started to draw for him. Showing him how he danced with me in therapy. He was my Angel. A parent holding me, my support. Biodanza gave me a way of expressing a connection to him visually, using images of the dances we did in class. It gave him a way of feeling what was going on with me.



When we drop fear,
we can draw nearer to
people, we can draw
nearer to the earth, we
can draw nearer to all
the heavenly creatures
that surround us.

Bell Hooks

FINDING MY WAY OUT OF THE LABYRINTH OF FEAR AND SHAME

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

Step 4 encourages the addict to tell their life story with a view to taking responsibility for choices made. Facing their defects of character, shame, and habitual blaming of others for where they've ended up. Pride and denial can prevent person from recovering fully. Ego gets in the way. When we write a step 4 the addict is forced to look at their lives and the choices they've made and take responsibility.

In Biodanza the Marathon Weekend Workshop of the Minotaur is a kind of equivalent.

The Minotaur Project addresses human fears. The fear is an instinctive reaction to natural danger and is linked with our responses of fight and flight. Fears are, therefore, a mechanism of survival.

In preparation for the Minotaur, we are asked to make a comprehensive list of our fears. And write a short life story. Before the Minotaur the Facilitators choose a dance that will present us with a challenge. To dance through our greatest fear and thus become released. The release is deep within the cells of the body. The impact is as profound as the Step 4 and 5 process. The difference being the one is cognitive and the other is emotional and cellular.

In the Minotaur we come out of hiding and dance through our deepest fears. In Step 4 the addict writes their story - making a fearless inventory of their lives, thus facing their fears, faults and demons. In Step 5 the addict reads the Step 4 Story to their sponsor or Therapist or a person they can trust - and release it... Opening space for a "new life".

In writing my Step 4 and facing my fears and defects and dancing through my fears in the Minotaur, I dived into a huge period of self introspection. My identity was slowly emerging. In reading it to my Therapist and dancing in front of my community I was facing my stuff, speaking it out, and dancing it out... in pursuit of a "new identity". I was beginning the process of "Losing my Personal History" (Carlos Castaneda) and tapping into my true essence and value as a human being. The Step work and Biodanza was working together to help me reclaim my 'original instinct for life and for love'.

The Minotaur Project is an extraordinary approach to the human destiny. A methodology for the discovering of one's identity. A myth from the ancient Greece and a contemporary ritual are used to open to an inner path.

The labyrinth is an archetypal metaphor to represent our existence, full of doubts and enigmas.

The Minotaur, creature with a human body and a bull head, symbolizes the wild and instinctive part which lives inside us like a primordial power.

The mission of the “project” is to re-establish the contact with these primordial forces, to value their beauty and their power of self-regulation. In this experience the “challenge” doesn’t consist in killing the “Inner Minotaur” but in assuming it (make it our own).

Prof. Rolando Toro

DANCING INTO THE LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

I read my Step 4 to my Therapist, and breathed a huge sigh of relief. Even in this process of presenting my Monograph I am making a Step 5 to the Biodanza community - once again, telling my story, standing naked and without shame for where I have come from. After all without the journey behind me I wouldn’t be where I am today.

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

“ Step 5 is about coming out of hiding. It’s about shame and being shamed. It’s about being so naked that you have nothing left to hide, and, having nothing to hide, you are free from shame.

Rami Shapiro

The Minotaur questionnaire indicated where I was at that time in May 2008.

I filled in the following:

- I need to work on developing boundaries and seeing them as helping supportive things, rather than something to exclude me or push me away or that make me “unlikeable”
- A better self image- more self love, a sense that I deserve and can get the love I need.
- Forgiveness and kindness towards myself for the choices I have made. I am hard on myself.

I was suffering from shame. From a sense of not being good enough. I recently listened to Brene Brown’s work on Shame. She suggests:

*Empathy can’t happen without vulnerability
Shame cannot survive empathy*

Over and over again I was experiencing the touch of affectivity from my Biodanza companions. Vivencia’s of caress and love. I knew I could trust my companions and teachers to hold a space of love in which I wouldn’t be judged. Where empathy and compassion would over come the shame I might feel.

The Minotaur weekend had a huge impact on my process in psychotherapy. The words and mythology crept into my eggs. I was Adriana who needed to have and direction. My therapist became Theseus - only able to help me if I gave him the golden ball of string to help navigate my labyrinth.

I found it traumatic watching others dance and the agony so many experienced. But something shifted for me. Anita always reminds me that I started smoking after the Minotaur. Every relationship I’ve had since the Minotaur has been with someone more worthy of me. My self esteem has steadily improved.

The goal of Affectivity in Biodanza is to rewrite the story of our relationships with loved ones, family, friends and lovers. To repair and rebuild with the support of my community, I faced my fears and opened my heart to the possibility that I am worthy of love.

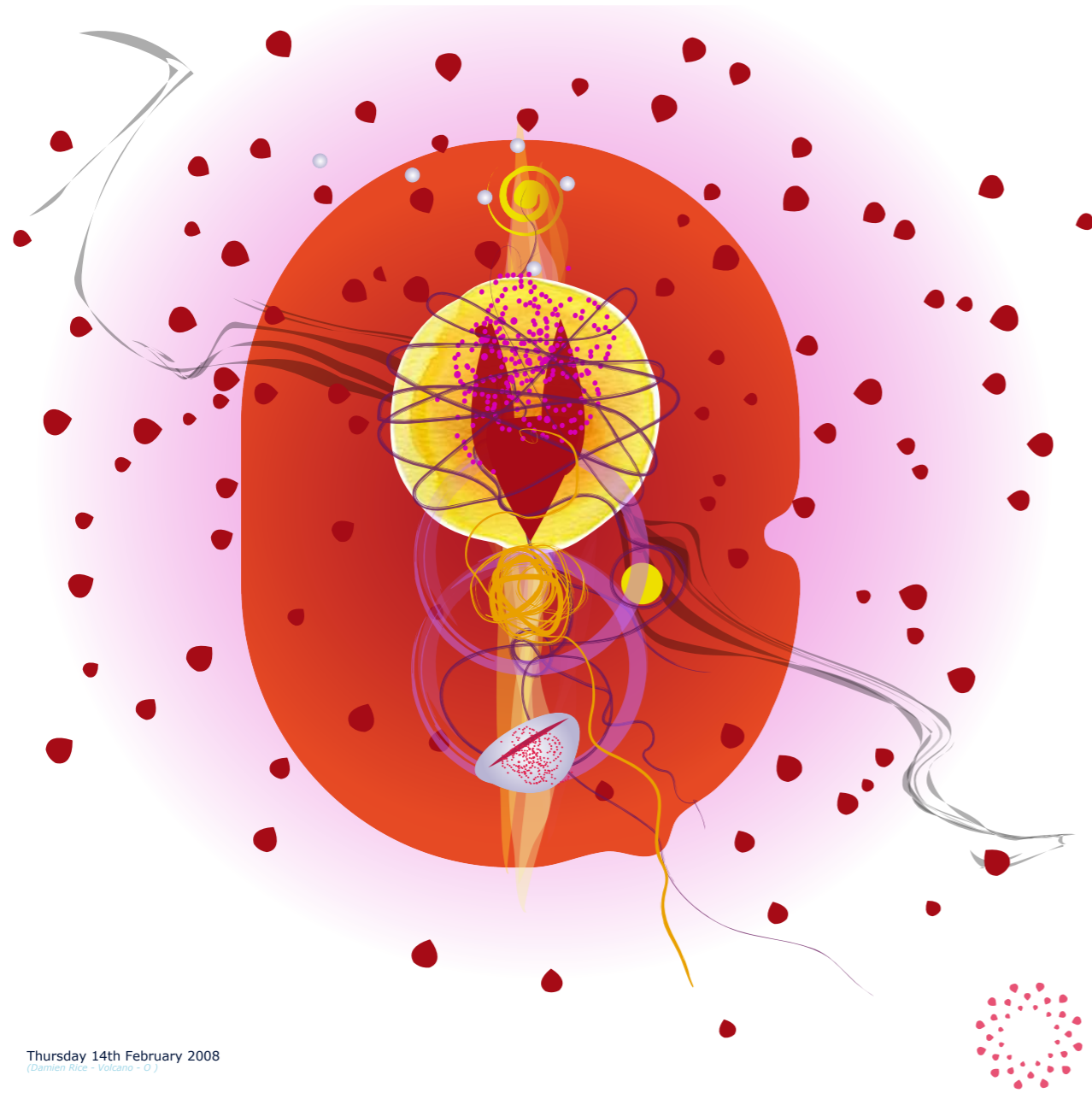
Biodanza, and sobriety in Recovery have worked towards healing my relationship with my family - my parents and my son.

The vivencias of affectivity and transcendence in Biodanza alter people’s perception of life and their relationships.

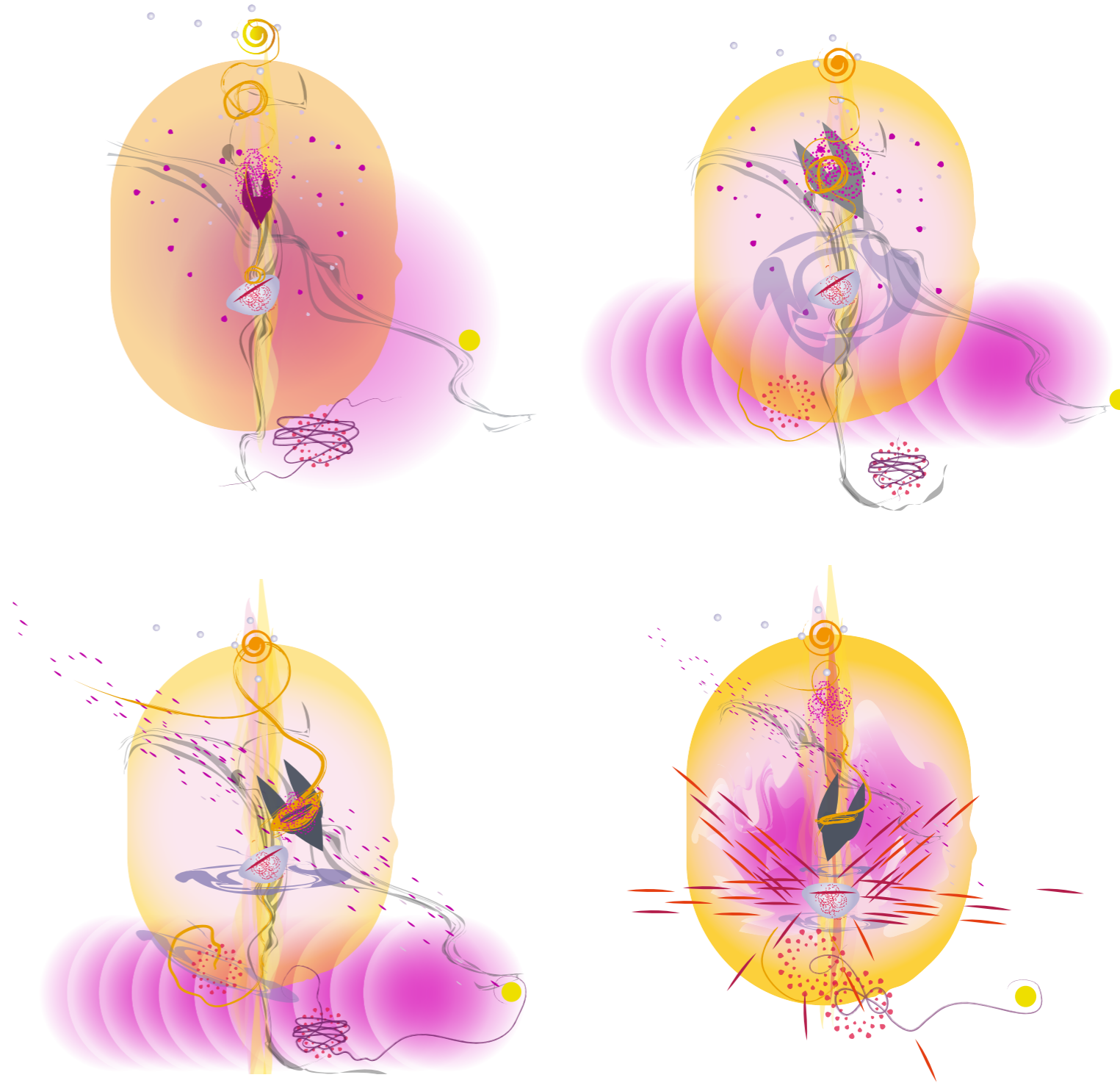
Rolando Toro

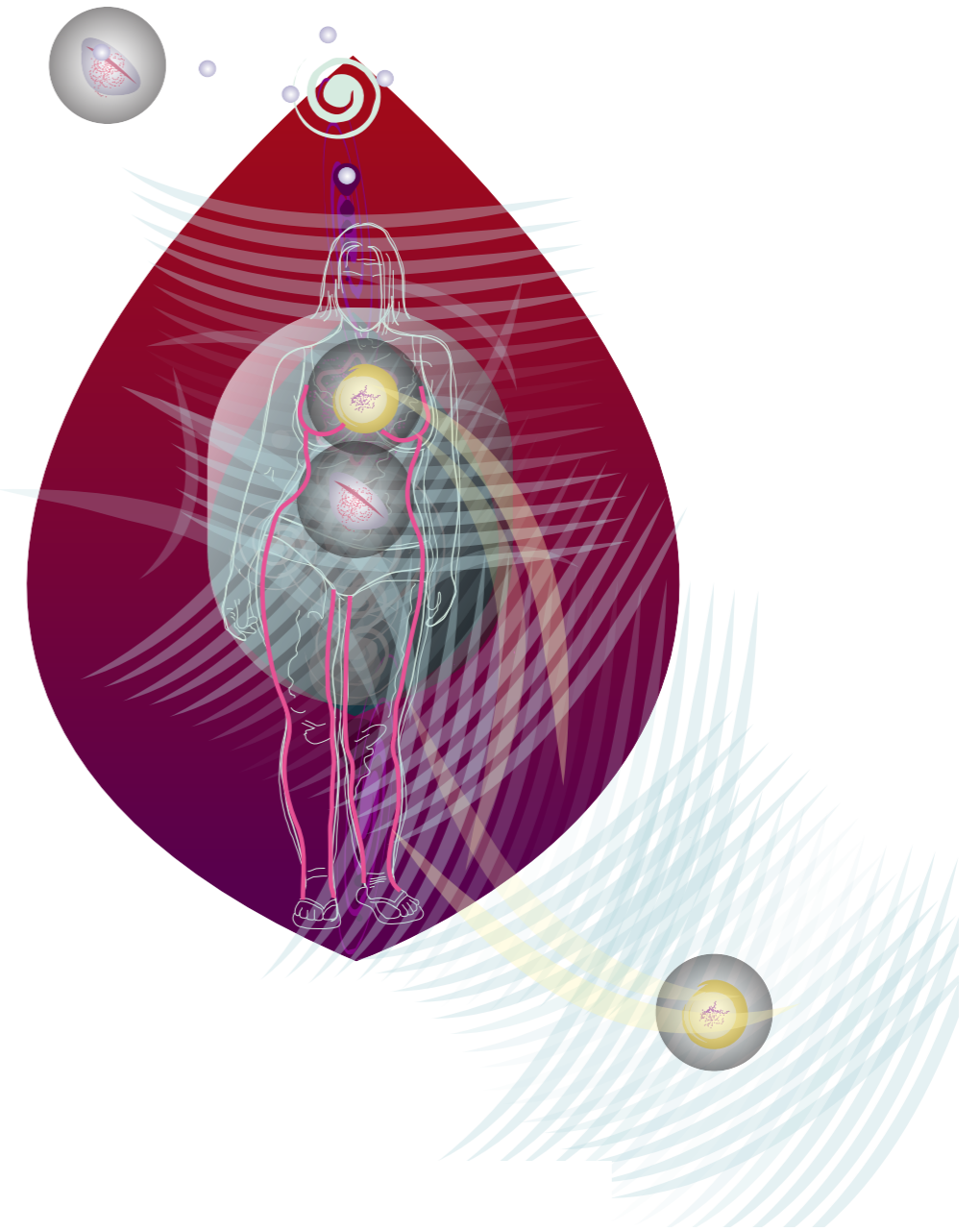
Biodanza has the power to take one away from one’s story, to become totally present in the here and now. To re frame ones identity. Being a victim of abuse, or child of divorced parents , or addict in recovery, no longer become defining traits to a personality but a distant history.

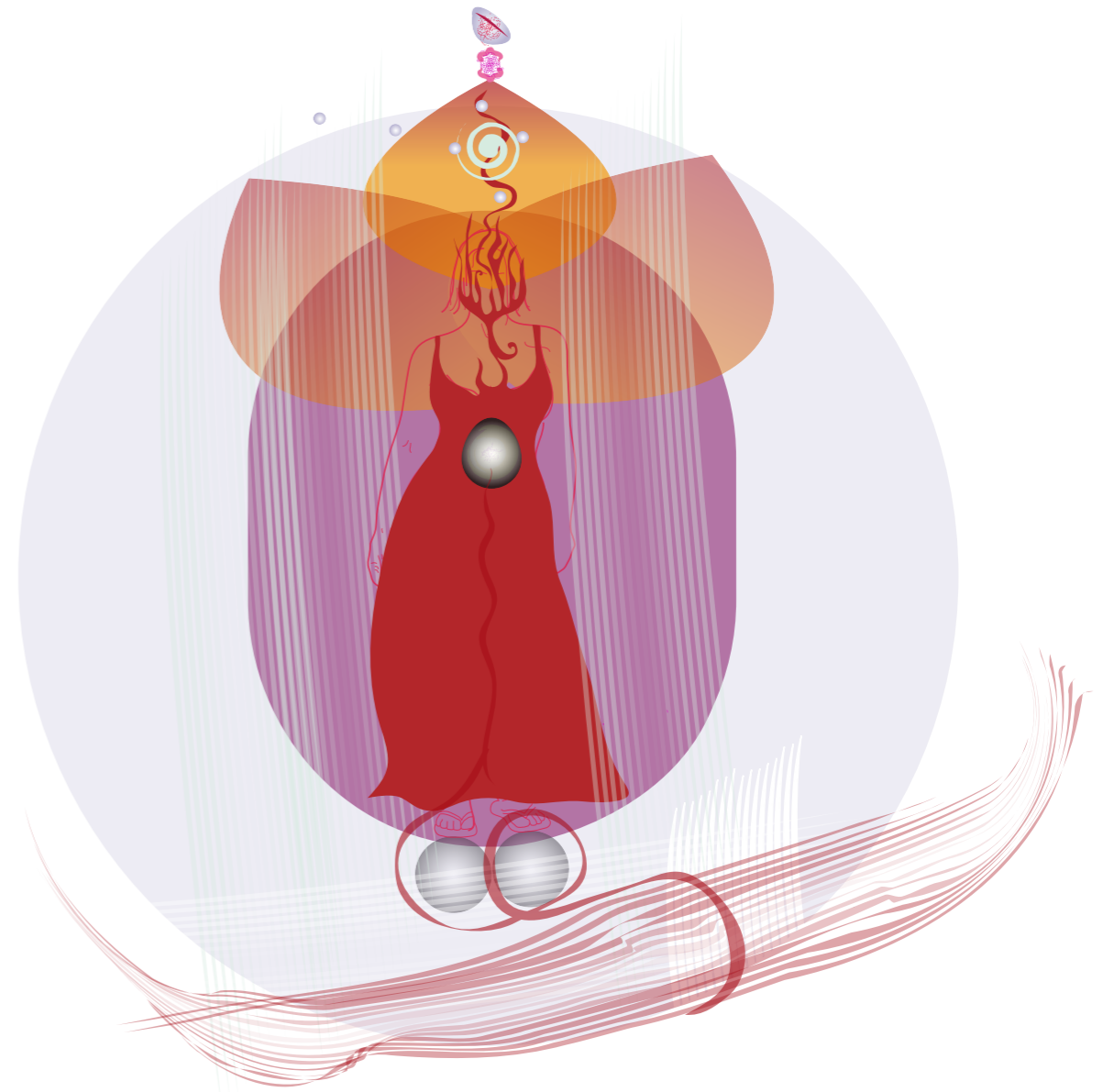
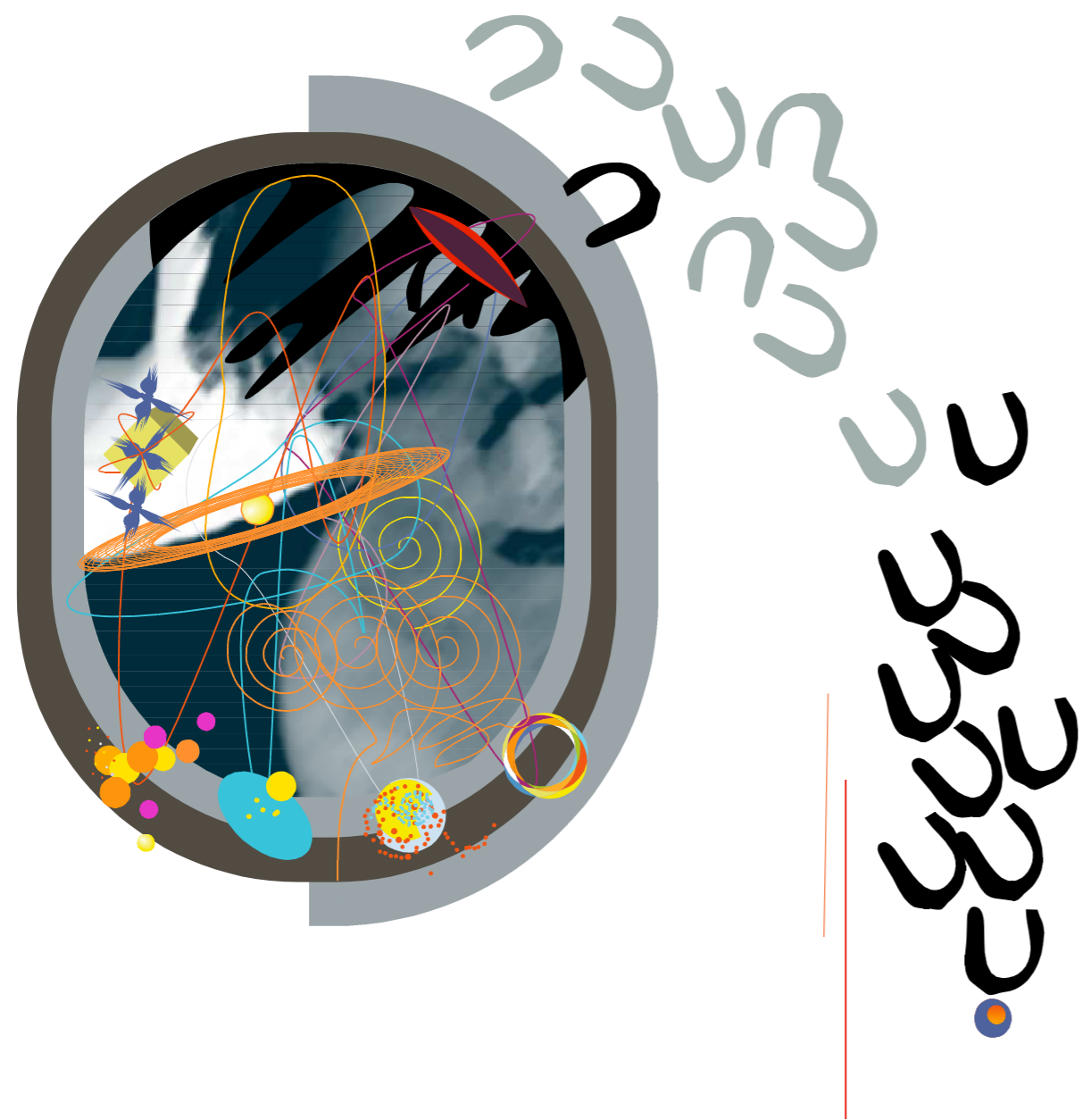
Over the following pages, I show some Egg diagrammes that emerged over the time of the Minotaur. The impact of the minotaur marathon fundamentally affected the diagrammes and the things I wanted to address in psychotherapy. They gave me and my therapist a whole new frame to work in. It shifted my perception of myself as unlovable to a lovable being.



Thursday 14th February 2008
(Damien Rice - Volcano - U)







Who am I ?

I am my name, thought of before I was known to be girl child,

I am my gender before I knew boys,

I am a creator of pictures of princesses and eggs,

I am an Afro, Irish, Croat,

I am a child of those who lost love for each other,

I am a survivor of an absent Father,

I am a recipient of a mothers love and fear,

I am a go-go dancer, a clumsy ballerina, a disco joller, a biondancero,

I am an computer user, oil painter and gardener,

I am a carer of others, I am a mother of one who didn't come from my womb and who isn't my colour, but who chose to be brought up by me.

I am a business woman, a poet, a penitent, an Aphrodite, a lover, a needer and obsessor,

I am a friend and threader together of like minded people,

I am a worker, independent and strong, I am a daughter, longing for looking after,

I am an African child, brought up on Irene's back, waiting until dark for my working Mothers return,

I am a singer in the shower, a chorus girl, an alto in the choir, a wailer of notes of pain and whelps of joy,

I am a cryer, a weeper, a pain feeler,

I am a round woman, curvy, strong limbed, wide hiped and sexy. I am beautiful and flawed. My hair thin and my hands old. My eyes green and my legs soft.

I am a maker, and a breaker of hearts, a good woman, soft and strong, capable and independent.

I am a man lover, forgiver, nurturer, supporter, adorer.

I an ex smoker, ex too much drinker, feeling drowner, drug taker, and mediator.

I am a food maker, healthy eater, earth lover. I am a mud player, sun worshiper, weather basker.

I am a people pleaser, boundary breaker, own way finder.

I am a changer, mover, shaker, trouble maker, and name caller.

I am a self explorer, self judger, me pitier, inner worker, better person wantar.

I am a cyclist, a spinner, a gymer, a gardener and sit arounder.

I am Michele, Mishbka, Mishpook, Mich, Michele and Juliette Dean.

I am a sister of three, Mother of one, daughter of four, friend of many, lover of men and women, and mother of other mothers children embedded in my heart.

I am a wayfarer, tho' fearful and intrepid traveler and adventure seeker.

I am a colour lover, of people, places, texture, religions, fabrics, food and nature,

I am image maker, diagramme sorter, sleep talker and screamer.

I am a big woman, a little girl, a dark fearer, a light chaser, I am a weak link and a strong room.

I am an open book and a cave dweller.

I am a soft soaper, a hard liner, a bad joker. I am a serious thinker, love maker and heart breaker.

I am a writer, a reader, and creator.

I am a toucher, kisser, dancer, carpet flyer.

Before, now and always, I am a life liver.

I am Michele.

Step 6 - Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

RECOVERING MY IDENTITY

Step 6 - Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

I never liked the term defects in the Recovery work sheets. I came to understand defects as aspects of my character that get in the way of a positive experience of life, and that I'd like work on. Self-centeredness, willfulness, pride, etc. I was ready to do the work to 'remove' them, although I believe it's on-going work that takes a lifetime. If the defects that brought me into addiction could be removed I was effectively rebuilding my identity in a place of sobriety - and moving away from stories that defined me in and from the past.

The self we imagine ourselves to be is a character drama we tell about our past lives...We are so attached to certain memories and certain kinds of feelings and ways of thinking that we cannot imagine ourselves being without them. Being entirely ready to have our defects removed means being entirely ready to see who we are without them.

Rami Shapiro - Recovery - The Sacred Art

Biodanza worked to reveal my identity through dances with my companions. Connecting with others means "losing myself" into them, and being able to return to my own centre. To come from my deep knowledge of my inner self and meet the other.

Gently, through dances of integration, my affectivity deepened as well as compassion and empathy for others and thus for myself.

Movement and music are the expression of our identity and the dance activates the central nucleus of identity.

Our identity is revealed in the presence of the other.

The vivencia of one's own value and self-acceptance is complex. It comes from the intense sensation of being alive, of feeling oneself, of feeling the body as a source of pleasure and knowing what one wants.

I stay who I am at the core, but my identity is a constantly changing. Hopefully always for the better, and in the service of love and Life.

Identity is contantly changing yet stays the same.... I am the same one that I was as a child: I have changed but I am the same one: I am changing, but I will always be the same one in essence.

Rolando Toro

BECOMING EMOTIONALLY INDEPENDENT

I stayed in psychotherapy for another 2 years. At the beginning of 2010 I decided I was strong enough to move on. The journey had been difficult. As the egg making slowed down and eventually stopped, I wasn't in so much angst anymore. I was free. Serenity was emerging. There was peace in my home and little by little, dance by dance, session by session, egg by egg, I started to feel myself worthy.

Personal Development course May 2009

In May 2009, when the next Biodanza school opened there was no question that I should dive into the Personal Development Course. Suddenly Biodanza became a place of serious study using cognition and words. It was entrancing and befuddling. The school weekends and vivencias were deeply bonding.

“Dance is a deep movement arising from the most unfathomable depths of the human being. It is the movement of life, biological rhythm, heartbeat, breath, rhythm, and impulse to connect with the species: it is a movement of intimacy.”

This quote particularly resonates with me. It inspires in me a longing to introduce people to the beauty of this system. It reminds me why, when I was most broken, Biodanza offered me refuge in the most primal place of my heart.

My first group with Kate had been strongly bonded but in the school space we could go much deeper. Really allowing ourselves to see and be seen. To be vulnerable enough so as to give and experience empathy.

“Biodanza is a system of affective integration, organic renovation and relearning of the original life functions, based on vivencias induced by dance, music and encounters with others in a group.”

The experience of Biodanza school fundamentally radicalised my Biodanza experience.

Lao Tzu's 4 Virtues

1. Reverence for all of life
- Respect
2. Sincerity - Honesty
3. Gentleness - Kindness
4. Support - service

The possibility of Biodanza as service

Personal development was an incredible adventure. I immersed myself. I was never sure I wanted to be a facilitator. Lack of self esteem made me doubt I had what it takes. However, I felt my life had so fundamentally changed that I really wanted to bring the system to the lives of others.

Step 12 - Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, and sharing the message

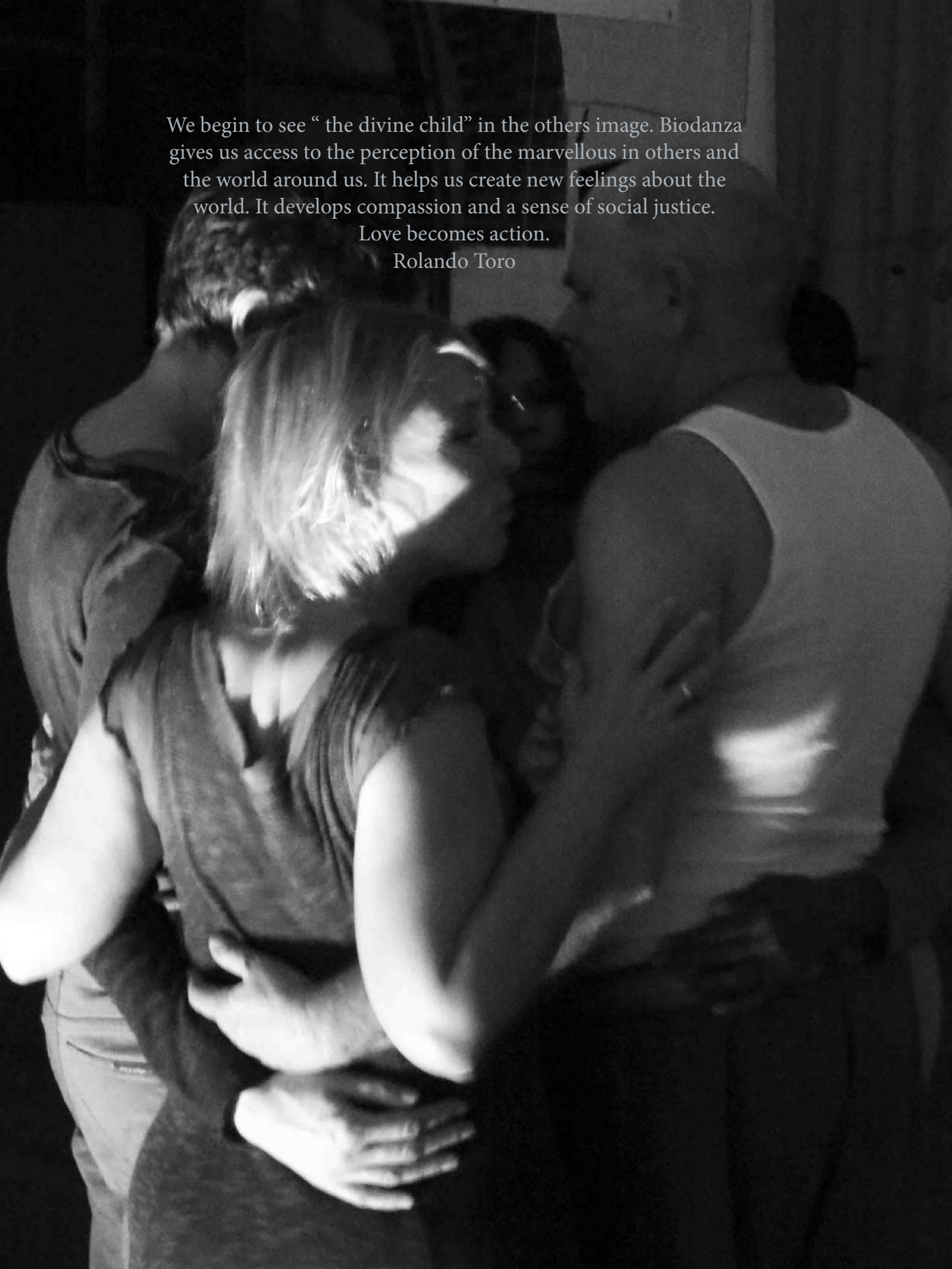
When Carolina interviewed me for the Methodology phase I knew I wanted to work with addicts, and others whose lives had been broken by addiction or co-dependence. I struggled through the final year of methodology. Now we were talking mechanics. To me the group felt disconnected and the weekends became long and hard. It felt like Biodanza was demanding as much as it had given me!

drawing after lunch. 10:00hrs.



Biodanza School 2009 - 2012 Thank you!





We begin to see “ the divine child” in the others image. Biodanza gives us access to the perception of the marvellous in others and the world around us. It helps us create new feelings about the world. It develops compassion and a sense of social justice.

Love becomes action.

Rolando Toro

4 Biodanza enhancing Recovery building self esteem

Is Recovering self esteem the key to recovery?

Biodanza combined with a 12 step programme and psychotherapy could impact positively on the lives of recovering addicts, alcoholics, sex addicts and codependents. I had a look at what Recovery actually means, from the dictionary definition to the 12 Step version, and added Rolando Toro’s ideas about Biodanza as a tool to recover our lives.

The Definition of ‘Recovery’ (Dictionary)

re-cov-er-y (r-kv-r) n. pl. re-cov-er-ies

1. The act, process, duration, or an instance of recovering.
2. A return to a normal condition.
3. Something gained or restored in recovering.
4. The act of obtaining usable substances from unusable sources.

Although millions of individuals and family members who are “in recovery” know what “recovery” means to them and how important it is in their lives, up until relatively recently there was no formal, accepted definition of recovery.

For the general public and for those who research, evaluate, and develop policies about alcoholism and drug addiction, recovery is a concept that can sometimes seem unclear. Even worse, to the general public, the term “recovery” is seen as “someone who is trying to stop using alcohol or other drugs.” It’s time for a change.

Essentially, recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction is a complex and dynamic process encompassing all the positive benefits to physical, mental and social health that can happen when people with an addiction to alcohol or drugs, or their family members, get the help they need.

Working Definition of Recovery (SAMHSA):

Recovery definition

In May 2011, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA -USA) released a holistic definition of Recovery Defined and a Unified Working Definition and Set of Principles that reflects SAMHSA's move into a "behavioral health definition" of recovery that is **inclusive of both addiction to alcohol and drugs as well as mental health recovery:**

“Recovery is a process of change whereby individuals work to improve their own health and wellness and to live a meaningful life in a community of their choice while striving to achieve their full potential.”

Principles of Recovery (SAMHSA 2005-2011)

- There are many pathways to recovery.
- Recovery is self-directed and empowering.
- Recovery involves a personal recognition of the need for change and transformation.
- It is supported by addressing trauma;
- Recovery is holistic.
- Recovery is culturally-based and influenced.
- Recovery exists on a continuum of improved health and wellness.
- Recovery is supported by peers and allies.
- Recovery emerges from hope and gratitude.
- Recovery involves a process of healing and self-redefinition.
- Recovery involves addressing discrimination and transcending shame and stigma. (it is based on respect)
- Recovery involves (re)joining and (re)building a life in the community.
- Recovery is a reality. It can, will, and does happen. Emerges from hope.

Four Major factors that support Recovery

1. Compulsory supervision: a counsellor, sponsor, priest or therapist.
(I had a supportive therapist)
2. A new source of hope, often spiritual in nature. Could be yoga, church, meditation, a higher power. (In my case it was Biodanza)
3. A competing behaviour Something you can't do if you drink. Yoga, a relationship, mothering. (In my case it was Biodanza)
4. New loving and supportive relationships with people not affected by my addiction.
(In my case it was people from Biodanza)

Biodanza echos these ideas non-verbally in the dance, imprinting in the being over, and over again that it is possible to let go, to allow life to look after us, to repair relationships with others, to find a deeper connection with ourselves.

Biodanza works towards mental, physical and spiritual health. It builds identity and encourages healthy relationships with others. Over and over in a class we see a mirror of ourselves in the other, thus developing compassion and a sense of connection.

The 12 Step Recovery programme and Biodanza both help us recover losses we have experienced as a result of addiction.

- **Loss of relationship**, with others. Families fall apart and become devastated by the addict's behaviour and the co-dependent attitudes of loved one emerge.
- **Loss of regard and relationship with self**
- **Loss of relationship with "God" or a higher power.** Addicts are often described as being in a spiritual crisis, their connection with themselves, others and a higher power is shattered. The 12 step programme has recovering spirituality at its core, ie: we learn to hand over to a higher power, stop controlling, start trusting, let go and let God.
- Other losses include self esteem, coping skills, health and fitness, self care and self loving behavior. They can include jobs, possessions, even life itself.

Developing spirituality is considered fundamental to a successful Recovery. And Gratitude is recognised as the single most important element in preventing relapse.

In Biodanza we dance in reverence to life over and over again. We rediscover the possibility for joy in our lives, we learn to dance with life, passionately and with immense gratitude. We loose guilt, develop compassion and a deep sense of belonging.

BIODANZA AS A POSTIVE RECOVERY (RENNOVATION) PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE STEPS

Doing the work

This monograph is a testimony to how Biodanza changed my life. I believe it could support the Recovery of others too. I hope it had made the link between the 12 Step programme and Biodanza and explored the co-hesion between the two.

Biodanza - a language

I see the role of Biodanza in re-building the identity in a way that releases the addict from stigma and shame. The 12 Steps endeavour to do this but there are limits in a system that is entirely cognitive in it's approach. In Biodanza we live the experiences intensely through the dance, using music and movement to awaken emotion and release feelings, to re-build strength and identity, to set limits and protective boundaries, to build self-esteem and confidence in a way that the body remembers without having to think about. **Biodanza uses affectivity - a language of love and feeling to connect to the heart of the individual.**

Over and over in the Rooms I heard stories from addicts that had become depersonalised. Devoid of feeling. Flattened by the jargon of the system. So similar in use of language that one story fits all. I understand that could be to protect the privacy of the speaker, but at the same time a sense of identity is stripped down to one thing - I'm an addict, or I'm and alcoholic - when actually I am so much more.

Recovery jargon sticks with the shameful branding of a person as an addict or alcoholic. Biodanza chooses to "work with the healthy part" of individual. Re-building self-esteem holistically. **At some point the addict needs to integrate into the world and leave shame and stigma behind. To dance into a serene and joyful new life, free to start from here and now free themselves from a personal history that keeps them stuck in an old story.**

This is my personal view. I understand that there's a need for an addict to identify with their illness long enough to get some good sober time. Introducing Beginner Biodanza to addicts in Rehab and offering classes post rehab could offer the addict extra support in their healing journey. I've come to believe that for now the best place for recovering addicts to dance and recover their lives is in a safe group with ordinary people - not necessarily with just addicts. This is in order to slowly, gently and kindly re-integrate them into the world that sees them for who they are. No words to label them as addicts, no stories of mayhem and destruction - just love, empathy, rebuilding... and seeing the beauty in themselves reflected in the eyes of others.

Going forward, I would like to establish a link with the rehabilitation centres n Johannesburg, especially with a view to introducing Biodanza as a practice addicts can enjoy once they have graduated from Secondary Care. I currently run a weekly group and workshops.

Over the next few pages I offer the testimonial of my psychotherapist, an expert in recovery counselling and the testimonies of two young addicts in Recovery that danced with me for 6 months.

We end up favouring intellectual knowledge and rationality, and lose our link with the heart of things and living beings.

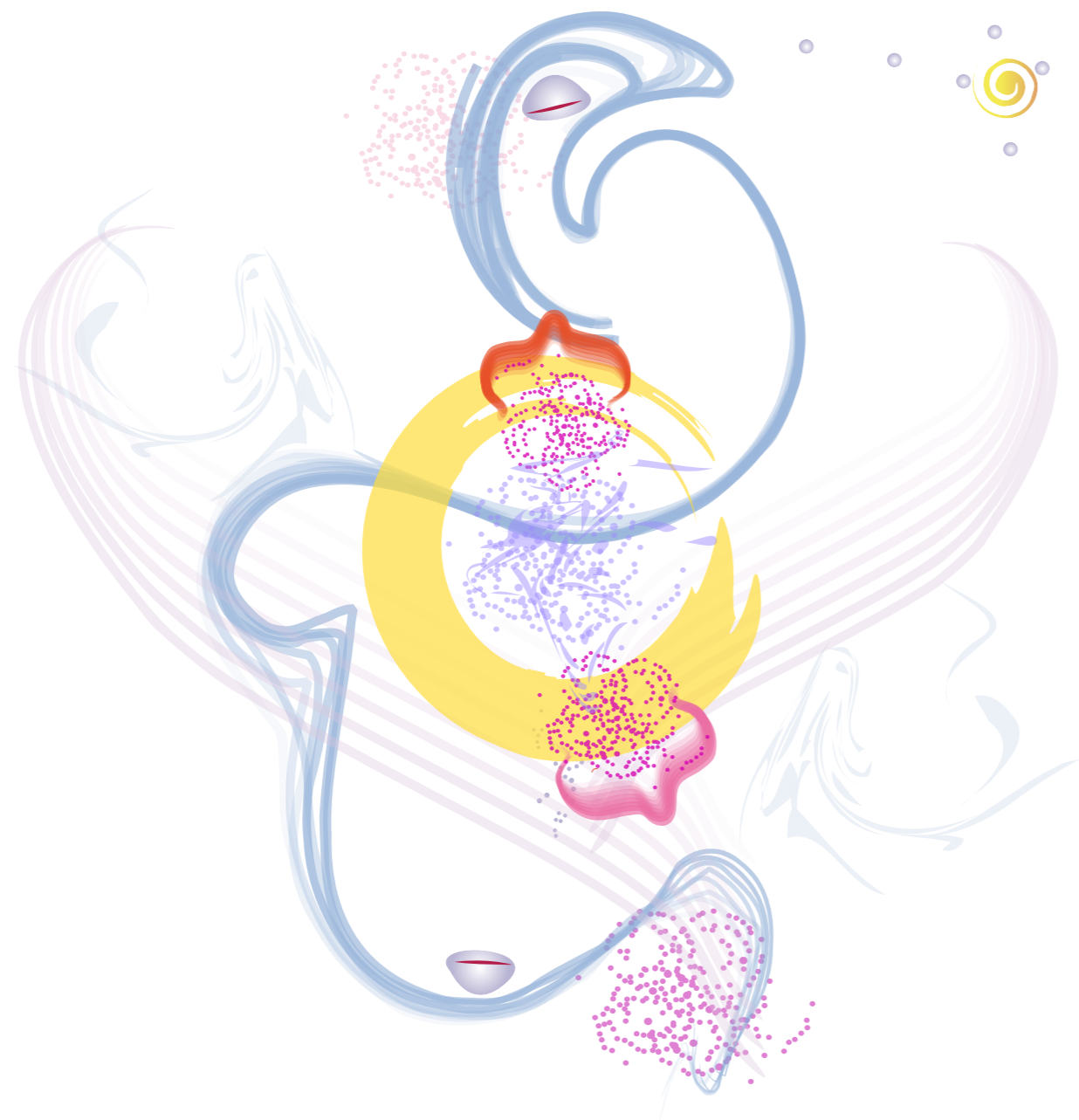
Rolando Toro

In Biodanza, we rescue the pleasure of moving. The satisfaction of feeling and moving in space as a possibility of evolution, expansion, and growth. We enter in touch, embrace, flow, breath, walk, jump, fly, create, launch ourselves into the world, communicate, give, love, desire, conquer, feel worthy and receive.

Sergio Cruz

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE 12 STEPS AND BIODANZA

	12 Steps (AA or NA weekly group meetings)	Biodanza - weekly classes
Structure	Strict time keeping (Boundaries) Set pattern to the meeting Starting and ending in a circle	Set pattern to the meeting Starting and ending in a circle
Communication	Verbal anonymous sharing of individuals recovery process No cross talk (no advice and conversation) Anonymity Talking and listening	Verbal anonymous sharing of individuals recovery process No cross talk (no advice and conversation) Anonymity Talking, listening and non-verbal dancing
Step 1.	We admitted we were powerless our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable	Accepting Life as something "uncontrollable" - surrendering, letting go, dances of fluidity and acceptance
Step 2.	Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity	Giving up control and allowing Life to be at the centre - restoring and connecting
Step 3.	Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God	No prescribed form of God - non-religious and accepting. Developing compassion for all living things
Step 4.	Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. (cataloging our 'defects' of character)	Minotaur project: Facing our fears. Writing them down honestly and willingly.
Step 5.	Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs	Minotaur project: Dancing our fear 'out' in front of our community. Receiving acceptance, love & support
Step 6.	Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character	Rebuilding identity: Letting go of our past, our story. Being here now in vivencia - each dance a moment of it's own.
Step 7.	Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings	Rebuilding identity: The repatterning of our inner beliefs and judgements on a cellular level, dance by dance
Step 8.	Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all	Compassion: Seeing others with eyes of love, as mirrors of ourselves. Biodanza promotes forgiveness.
Step 9.	Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others	Personal relationships outside Biodanza are often healed through the experinece in the the dances... of letting go, being loveable, not afraid, developing boundaries
Step 10.	Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it	A new way of being in the work. No desire for conflict, control or authority. A wish to connect at the heart level with everyone
Step 11.	Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out	Continued dancing in a the Biodanza community, strengthening and deeping the affective bonds with each other and our sense of being part of the totally of the Universe
Step 12.	Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs	Carrying the Biodanza messge to friends and family and groups in need. Promoting the experinece Biodanza as a healing system. Biodanza school and extensions. A way of life with life at the centre



**Biodanza is
non-verbal, non-
interpretative and
non-analytical**
*(Biodanza lovers - face
book)*

Tuesday 4th December Goodbye lovely one... see you in my dreams, where you love me freely.

INTERVIEW WITH MY THERAPIST ABOUT BIODANZA'S ROLE IN MY RECOVERY

Michele: You worked with me for 4 years, in your opinion how do you think Biodanza affected my therapy/recovery process / growth and development?

KW: I would say that it did play a significant role in your development. I always had the sense that there was a level of woundedness that you experienced that traditional talking therapy struggled to access. The Biodanza assisted and supported the the psychotherapy by allowing you to experience and explore powerful emotions in a creative and non-threatening manner.

Michele: What was your experience of working with the stories and experiences I brought from Biodanza, ie, did it help or hinder your understanding of me... did you find it relevant information to work with?

KW: I think that it assisted me in getting to understand you better. I came to realize that language sometimes gets in the way of creative expression. A central feature of Biodanza seems to be not talking about feelings or "processing" them, but rather just experiencing them as is.

Michele: Would you recommend your other clients to do it?

KW: I have done already.

Michele: Why?

KW: There are many important aspects of human psychology that Biodanza addresses such as the relationship between affect and behaviour, and the relationship between affect and group social behaviour. Biodanza allows people to experience emotion in a social manner.

Michele: Do you think it would be valuable to include Biodanza in the rehab environment? Why?

KW: Yes. For the same reasons I would recommend it to patients.



INTERVIEW WITH KAYLI HART (27TH DECEMBER 2013):

Kayli had been in Recovery for 1 year when she started Biodanza. At the time of this interview she had been dancing for about six months.

Michele: In recovery we often get saddled with this identity of being an "Addict". I found I was at risk of losing a sense of the other things that I am. The "identity" of being an Addict felt negative. Biodanza changed that for me. What was your experience?

Kayli: Biodanza changed that for me entirely. There's always been this stigma ever since I found out that I had a problem with drugs and alcohol... like there's something wrong with me... and I was trapped in this little cage of being an addict... and I have to fight addiction for the rest of my life... like, it was crippling. In the beginning I could think of nothing else other than that I was an addict. I was trapped in addiction and recovery. It was horrible. I was in a box for a very long time. I promise you it was incredible... Biodanza let me feel human again because I got to experience something other than just recovery. It's not just going to coffee, (as in after AA or NA meetings), it's laughing, it's sharing life and joy and stuff like that. It was freeing. It was very freeing.

Michele: And did it feel dangerous for you? *(in the "rooms" addicts are encouraged not to go to "dangerous places" or be with "dangerous people" in order not to get into tempting or difficult situations)*

Kayli: No, no, no...

Michele: I know you were going to meetings every night, and that you were worried that you were going to lose a meeting.

Kayli: I was scared, because there are some people that do these radical changes. They do Recovery, and then suddenly they do life coaching and then they relapse and die! You know that kind of thing. I was scared to move away from my meeting because that was keeping me sober, but it was so much more rewarding to feel human again. To feel normal. You know to be able to laugh, and you know, to not be bound by my Recovery in every action, in every movement and stuff like that. It was incredibly freeing.

Michele: And your identity in the Biodanza space it not necessarily that of an addict.

Kayli: No I'm not an addict. I'm Kayli! It's just me. It is everything that I am made up of. It's incredible for me to dance, because I forget about everything else and it just comes back to me. My feelings, my body, my mind. You know, not my addiction, and my recovery and my past. It's just me in that space, there and then. No future no past. Just now. And that's what's so freeing. I was so tired of being stuck in recovery and addiction.



Michele: And do you feel safe?

Kayli: Very safe. I don't think there's a safer place for me. Honestly, the rooms, are safe, but there's other recovering addicts. People that are still using and stuff like that. If you think about it, it could be a dangerous space. When I'm dancing (in Biodanza) there's none of that. There's no temptations. There's no taking about this or that. There's nothing. It's about dancing. It's about freeing your soul. It's not about my addiction. I don't ever feel unsafe there. It's not about that. My life is changing every time I dance, because I'm learning about myself and my strength, and my ability to overcome fears, like, when it comes to being close to people and expressing myself. Stuff like that. It's done a lot for me - more than I ever thought it would.

Michele: How long had you been in recovery when you started dancing?

Kayli: A year and a half.

Michele: And, did you keep go to meetings during this time?

Kayli: Ja.

Michele: Do you think it would be valuable to have a class that was just for addicts?

Kayli: The thing is I was integrated with "normal" people - and that taught me that I'm still normal, I'm still human. I like not being put in that box - with other addicts. You could have a class just for addicts, but in my opinion for them - classes after rehab would be the most beneficial for them to integrate into other groups. The thing is what I learnt in the beginning is that I'm still human. That's its okay to laugh. It's okay to express yourself. That was absolutely necessary for me in the beginning. Having a class for addicts would teach them that there's nothing wrong with them. They've just got a disease - they can still dance and express themselves.

Michele: Are you saying that you've accessed a part of yourself that can celebrate life without the risk of using, or feeling like you need to drink in order to get free.

Kayli: Like I said when started this interview - I learnt about my freedom when I started Biodanza. I was not free before I started. I was bound by my addiction. I was bound by my recovery. When I started Biodanza I realised that doesn't make me who I am. It was very significant for me.

Michele: So my question is around your identity - that being an addict doesn't make you who you are - there's so much more...

Kayli: There's way more... that's just a part of me that needs addressing, but it's not all of me. I'm not only an addict. I'm Kayli. I have an addiction problem. I also have dreams, I have feelings and desires, and fears. And being able to dance and connect with myself and other people, and the music especially - that freed me from this place of just being an addict. I can't just be an addict my whole life. I'm never gonna get anywhere!



Michele: What was your experience of your first class?

Kayli: In my first class I was still very closed off. I was still so stuck. I went in thinking that I was going to a non-choreographed dancing class and that it was going to be lame. I had no idea of what was coming and I was very hesitant of what was gonna happen. Because I knew my life was about to change. When I met you to find out about Biodanza I just knew something was gonna change for me. But when I went into the class I felt really silly and like, negative... like, I don't feel like doing this today. My first class was awful - I was hiding, I couldn't look at people in the eyes. I have never felt more exposed in my life. It felt like I was standing naked in a room full of people looking at me. **I was terrified.**

Michele: Has your experience of Biodanza impacted on how you are in the rooms or with your sponsees?

Kayli: I think it made me more comfortable as a person. The way I deal with people is different, so the way I deal with my sponsees is different. I think I'm a lot more open to sharing experiences with people but it didn't impact my Recovery. My recovery stayed strong. It impacted me as a person. I kept going back and doing what I had to do to stay recovered, but Biodanza was a way for me to work on me as a person.

Michele: So, what do you think of the idea that Biodanza is a personal development system and that it could enhance the experience of recovery? I want to work with addicts so that they have the experience of reintegrating into integrating into society not just as an addict but as a whole being. So do you think that idea could work, if I pitch it to rehabs?

Kayli: I don't think there's a better way to do it. The rooms don't offer stuff like this. And if every addict could experience what I experienced. That's all I want. That every addict could recover. The thing is we 'use' (alcohol and drugs) because of a lot of reasons. We used because we didn't feel good enough. We use because of past experiences of deep rejection and abandonment. I learned to connect with myself, to express myself, without using words because words can be hurtful. Dancing cannot hurt you, it can only make you feel better. And it betters me in a way that nothing I've ever experienced can.

Michele: I guess what we are saying is that Biodanza has enhanced your recovery process.

Kayli: One hundred percent. I think it's created a lot of security within myself. Especially with myself esteem and trusting myself. I've learned a lot about setting boundaries. I've learned more in the six months of doing Biodanza about setting boundaries than I learned in 2 years of recovery. Because you taught us in the classes that it's okay to say no. It's okay to say "this is too much, I'm sitting out -or this is fine - feedback, giving and receiving. That gave me a lot of self confidence. In return the self confidence has made me stronger person. Because I know what's okay for me out in the real world. "This is not alright. You can't speak to me that way,

"...it's incredible for me to dance, because I forget about everything else and it just comes back to me. My feelings, my body, my mind. You know, not my addiction, and my recovery and my past. It's just me in that space, there and then. No future no past. Just now. And that's what's so freeing.

Kayli H, an addict in Recovery in my own Biodanza group

Biodanza produces natural gestures that enable us to recover our movement and the most sincere expression of our very selves.

Rolando Toro



I don't accept your advances" for example. I'm not comfortable in this situation so I'm gonna leave. And I think my recovery is stronger as a result. I trust myself more. I know I can say no when I need to. That's because of what I've learned in Biodanza. Like that dance where I was dancing with the two men and I sat out because I felt uncomfortable. That taught me an incredible amount about myself. That I don't have to be in an awkward situation if I don't want to be. I would never have learned that in the rooms because you never have to engage to that degree.

Michele: So that non-dance... it was a choice not to do...had this huge impact.

Kayli: Massive. Most of the dances have had an impact.

Michele: Can you tell me about some other dances that have had that impact.

Kayli: Another one where we combined the two classes with Franz. I remember it was my turn to go into the tunnel of illumination. We've done one before with no touching. But with this one I was scared because Alex was there. I was scared of everyone in the room at the time because I was going through my own stuff. I didn't actually want to be touched by anyone. I was going through a phase of cutting off - like addicts do - like "don't" "I don't want" and I remember I was shaking as I was standing in that tunnel. You had your arms around me and you said "Are you ready?" I was kind of like "shit - am I ready?" and then you said "close your eyes, breathe -now go" and i just closed my eyes and walked and I was shaking as I went through that tunnel, but every single hand that touched me, touched me with warmth and love, and acceptance, and I felt that to my very core. And I nearly started crying. I didn't know who, when, where... and I just walked and I just got filled with love.

And then after that it was like a wall had been broken down. It was like it was okay to let people in when I was feeling like that and that changed the way that I thought about my own pain. Like -its okay to share with people - to let people in while I'm feeling like that. because if I don't I can send myself down the wrong path. But if I open my heart and allow people in when I'm feeling like that I'll only be filled with love. The people are there to help you and love you, to support you whether they know you are going through it or not. But there was a general atmosphere of love and lightness and happiness in that class. My whole outlook to everything that was going on changed after that. I couldn't stop smiling. I was beaming from ear to ear.

Michele: Beautiful! Wow! Thank you Kayli Hart!

Kaylie's twin sister Jax danced with us for 6 months before she went to New Zealand.

Jax is also in recovery and very kindly given me an interview before she left in 2013



5 How it is now - dancing joy & serenity

Love is not love
until we put it
into action.

Rolando Toro

When Kate decided to follow her heart to Australia in 2011 I had nearly finished Biodanza school. In Jan 2012 Kate dropped a bombshell and asked me to take over her group at Roosevelt Park. I knew her well enough to know that this wasn't just about friendship. This was Kate's invaluable and enormous gift to me. Belief that I could. That I am good enough. Different to her, but able to hold a space, care for people's process, dance the dance, and enough of a fellow Virgo to be able to be consistent and methodical in my approach.

Kate was leaving in April and it left me very little time to finish my essays and do supervisions. A few months of super stress followed as she encouraged me, mentored me, badgered me, believed in me whilst she packed up her entire life to leave for Australia. I was terrified. I could never be Kate. Beautiful Aphrodite, graceful dancer and holder of the most cohesive Biodanza groups in Jozi. The process was grueling. I ploughed through essays, assisted Kate in her classes and did my terrified best. She believed in me. Many others didn't believe I could do it. It was a huge task. I was terrified, yet deeply honoured. There was never a question of turning the offer down. I finished my essays and white knuckled through my supervisions.

Kate is a huge part of my life. She's become much more than my Biodanza facilitator. She is my friend and I hers. Losing her to Australia was devastating for me and many others. Having to keep the group alive gave me a way of still being with her. Her shoes could never be filled, I would never be Kate, but I could reach into myself, a new identity, built, seen, and believed in - I could only do my best. It wasn't easy. I was immensely stressed and nervous before every class. I prepared for at least 10 hours for each class.

After Kate left, Franz Grabe supported me in the first few months of teaching, reviewing my class before the vivencia, dancing in my class as a participant and giving me feedback if I wanted it. Kind and patient Franz's presence was a pillar of immense strength and support.

I realise now 2 years later, that it's really through the holding of the groups as a facilitator that my real Biodanza learning has come. I couldn't have done it without my personal history, my own healing. Kate had watched my healing. She held the Biodanza space for me as Kenneth had held the psychotherapy space. And she believed I had something of my experience to pass on.

I left therapy in 2010. Kenneth and I remained in contact. I longed for him to do Biodanza. To experience this amazing system for himself. Something for himself.

" Friendship is a feeling that allows the other to be free.
There is no jealousy in friendship, it's deep respect for what
the friend feels. Friendship is, as we see it, a complex feeling
that is deepened over time"

"Friendship is essentially creative"

Rolando Toro

He too had seen me heal and described my journey as "one of the most amazing he'd ever been part of" In Sept 2011 Kenneth came to his first Biodanza class... with me as the facilitator. We'd come full circle. In May 2012 Kenneth, Franz and myself developed a day workshop for sex addicts and their loved ones, combining theory about the psychology of addiction and Biodanza in practice. It was well received and we plan to do more.

In October 2013 Kate invited me to assist her in a corporate Biodanza training in the Philippines.



Rolando Toro suggests that there are 3 fundamental existential questions we ask of ourselves in pursuit of fulfilment and happiness.

What do you want to do?

Where do you want to live?

Who do you want to be with?



By October 2012 I longed to have my own group. Something in me wanted to try and see if I could do it without Kate's help. On my own. There's no doubt that the experience of having her original group made it sooo much easier for me to conceive of and plan a new one.

I went back to Saint Peters -the original church hall I'd had my first Biodanza class in. I spoke to the pastor and she agreed. Again - coming full circle... I started a new beginner group there in Oct 2012. Aniesa has been supporting me with the music and door and I hope the experience will give her a head start as Kate gave me. The Melville group is going strong. We are a diverse bunch of young and old, black and white, we have a few addicts in Recovery, and a co-dependent or two!

I'm loving teaching. The nerves are gone, and I've learned so much but I still feel like a baby. Sanclair Lemos says it takes 10 years to really get Biodanza so I have another 2 to go. Every week I refer to the manuals and trawl the play lists. Every week I hear another participant tell me how Biodanza is working positively in their lives. I feel so thrilled, privileged and excited to be holding this space for other now.

A second Minotaur for a new era

In May 2012, Christos and Lida held a Minotaur weekend in the Magliesberg. Many of Kate's old group came, and we bonded deeply over this beautiful process. In preparation we were asked to make a drawing. Mine showed the life force within and all the things I wanted to do with my life. I wanted a sense of spirituality, to look at my fear of death, I wanted to start a new group, I wanted to travel around the world, I wanted to do more creative work and I wanted to find love.

The challenge Christos and Lida prepared for me was one of rebirth, of coming into the world wanted, acknowledged and loved. It was deeply moving and profound. All the things I wanted to work with are happening.

In summary - Biodanza's work in my life

- I haven't had a drink for nearly 8 years.
- I've lost 20kgs and kept it off.
- I've haven't been to a doctor in 8 years. I have hardly even had a cold.
- I've done "sport" for the first time in my life. Riding the 94.7 2 years in a row. I gym, I do yoga
- I've travelled to 4 Asian Countries and Europe
- My relationship with my family has healed
- My relationship with my son has healed
- I've let go of a stressful business to make space for more creativity in my life to flow
- I go to art classes once a week and paint and draw when ever I can
- I facilitate a Biodanza class once a week
- I've discovered a sense of spirituality I didn't think was possible
- **I've discovered love - real love, love that values and appreciates me, for the first time in my life.**

A tribute to Biodanza Melville Group Thank you





Thank you Biodanza
Thank you Life

