

The Infinity Point

Adventures into the Void

By Joe and Melody Cheal

**If the doors of perception were cleansed,
everything would appear to mankind as
it is, infinite –**
William Blake

Infinity and nothingness

The concept of infinity is a fun thing to play with. It soon begins to baffle the mind with its unlimited, unrelenting hugeness! Consider this... If an infinite amount of chimpanzees are each given a typewriter, some chimpanzees will immediately set about writing the works of Shakespeare. When an infinite amount of chimpanzees are typing away, whilst some are working on Shakespeare, others will be typing a critique of the works of Shakespeare. Others will be typing the theory of relativity. Indeed, chimpanzees will immediately be typing up every single written work from the beginning to the end of time... In fact, an infinite amount of the chimpanzees will immediately set about writing the works of Shakespeare. Further still, every single written piece of work will be typed up an infinite amount of times. In addition, there will be every conceivable combination of 'mistakes', from a single letter out of place in a piece of work to complete gobbledegook. And probably some other stuff too...such is the nature of infinity.

If this boggles your mind, welcome to the realm of the infinite! Why is infinity of interest to us? Have you ever lost yourself for a bit, perhaps within a daydream and then returned with a new idea or a solution to a problem? If so, you have been into (and come back from) what Fritz Perls called 'the fertile void'. Going into the void means stepping off your map of the world for a while...going beyond the 'known'. Julie Silverthorn and John Overdurf explain that when you go into the void, you get resources and then land back in a different part of your map. This allows you to take a trip beyond and outside a problem state to a more resourceful place. The 'adventure into the void' is nothing new of course;

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shamans and yogis have been exploring such places for millennia.

Infinity is the cousin of zero. Indeed, in the paradox of nothing lay the seeds of the infinite. If you do not believe us, try dividing any number by zero and you will see! The void is often associated with 'nothingness' which in itself brings together both zero and the infinite. We believe that within these concepts lay two highly valuable and yet polar meta-states...the Infinity Point and the Zero Point. The Infinity Point is that place where we are in the void (de-void of ego perhaps) and where we may lose our sense of embodiment and gain a sense of connectedness beyond ourselves. This would tally with what Robert Dilts has previously called the 'infinity perceptual position'. The Zero Point is the antithesis, the focused point of being completely present, in the here and now, free of internal dialogue and temporal thinking. When we bring ourselves back to our Zero Point, we 'stop the world' (in the words of Carlos Castaneda) and focus on what Eckhart Tolle calls the 'power of now'. This article is primarily about one of the cousins of the void...the Infinity Point.

The ecology of the void

Some people we have worked with have

expressed initial concerns about the concept of the void. In some ways, this is not surprising since Western Culture has had a history of shunning the concept of both zero and infinity. Medieval Western scholars branded the void as 'evil' with the following argument...God is omnipotent, there is nothing God cannot do, God is the ultimate goodness and cannot do evil, and therefore evil equals nothing. It was not until the 16th century that the concept of zero, void and vacuum was not considered heresy. Western beliefs held mathematics and science back while the Orient blazed ahead! We have been taught in our language to avoid the void, in case we experience annihilation (from the Latin 'towards nothingness') because this would be abysmal (from the Latin and Greek for 'deep, bottomless'). It is fascinating (to us) that the abyss has taken on such an 'evil' connotation when it simply means profound, immeasurable and unfathomable. What a shame that the Western world has historically associated the concept of the void with less than positive meanings. Time to claim back the resources of the unfathomable!

Of course, there will be contexts under which explorations of the void may not be ecological and these are the same situations where hypnosis (and perhaps NLP 'inner work' in general) is inappropriate. There are no doubt certain medical conditions and psychological health issues that would require expert advice. Since it would be fair to say that a journey into the void is akin to hypnosis or meditation, the same rules would apply when it comes to working with people. Obviously this is another article unto itself and outside the scope of what we are covering here.

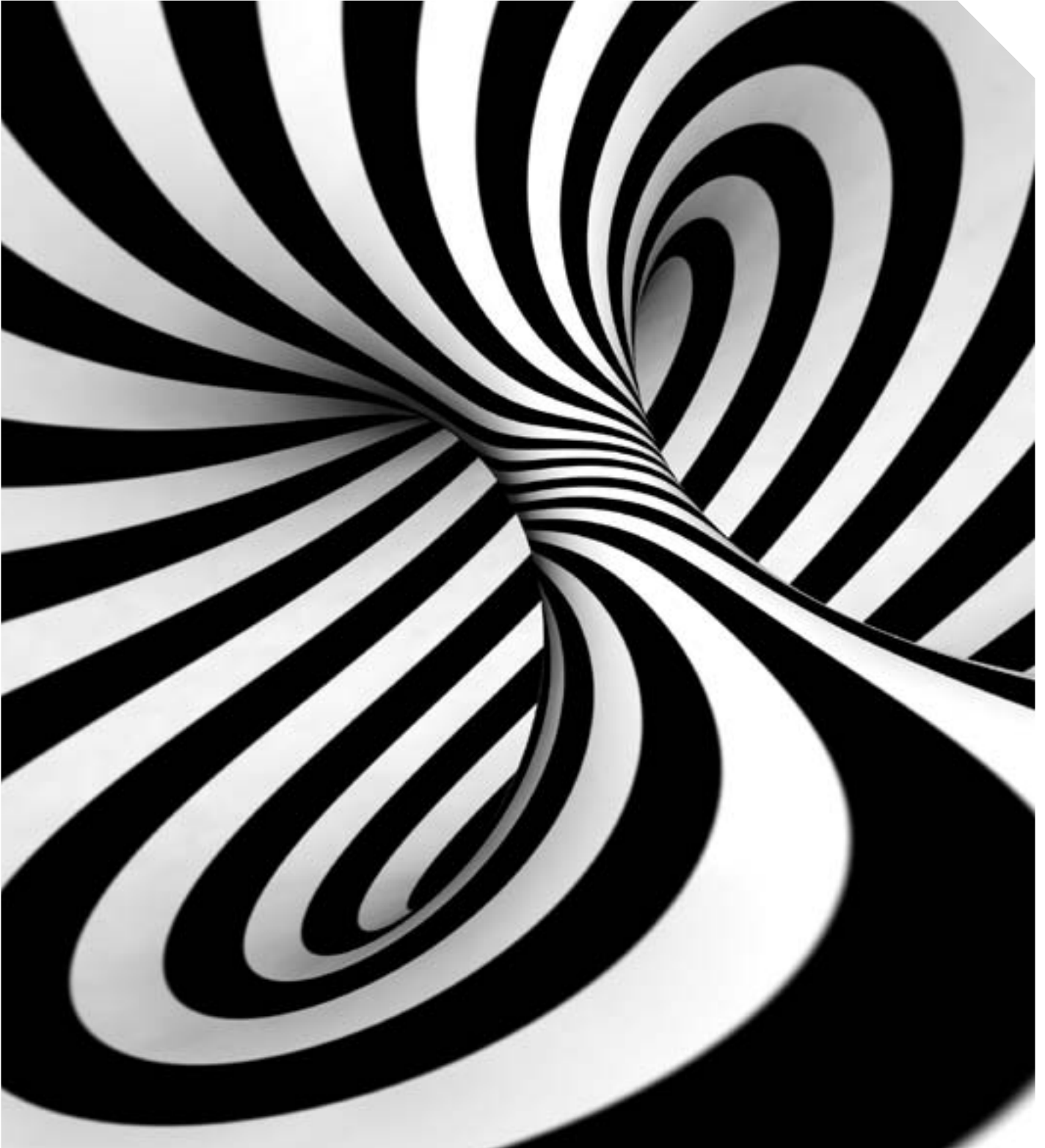
The void in metaphor

Our stories, myths and legends are full of adventures into the void. Joseph Campbell wrote of a stage in the 'Hero's Journey' which he called the 'Belly of





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→ the Whale' which is the journey into the unknown. He references Jonah being swallowed by a whale (and, of course, we could also reference Pinocchio here too!) and the 'resurrection' afterwards. The resurrection story might also be considered a metaphorical journey into and back from the void. The journey into the void might also be represented as being 'swallowed by the dragon', the dragon being a term we use for our challenges, problems and issues. Our favourite story of a journey into the void is from *The Lord of the Rings* where Gandalf falls into the abyss with the Balrog (a demon) and emerges later wiser and more powerful.

All of these stories tell of a hero going into the void and emerging with greater resources, be it power, wisdom, serenity, confidence or compassion. This captures the spirit of adventures into the void... to return better, greater, developed and improved in some way.

Gateways to the void

How might you enter the void? Aside from the occasional period of daydreaming, meditation is a gentle way of working in and around the void. If you have ever meditated and 'lost' a period of time then you may have experienced 'the Gap'. Whilst this may not happen every time you meditate, if you allow yourself to ponder an issue or hold a question in mind and then let it go whilst letting yourself follow your breathing...who knows where you

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may wander. And, of course, as Milton Erickson was fond of saying as he took people into a guided journey into the void via trance... 'And whilst who knows where you may...that's right...you know where...no-where is...do you not...'

There are other models and concepts you might wish to explore. Negation appears to have an interesting affect on the brain: 'when wouldn't you not think that not considering language patterns wouldn't have an impact, doesn't it?' Negation is also known as the 'inverse' (what would happen if you did not?) and 'converse' (what would not happen if you did?) in the Cartesian Co-ordinates model (usually taught on NLP Master Practitioner and introduced to NLP by Tad James as far as we can make out). And if you were to explore the fourth question of the Cartesian Co-ordinates

(known as the 'non-mirror image reverse') you might wonder what would not happen if you did not go into the void... now and again.

If language patterns fascinate you, we would also highly recommend John Overdurf and Julie Silverthorn's 'Beyond Words'...an audio recording of a workshop dedicated to the void! When we thought we knew NLP well, this recording blew us away...into the void many times and back again!

Beyond the void

This article was designed to be a taster...a thought provoker...an introduction to the 'fertile void'. To step off our maps from time to time is a wonderful way to develop new resources, to get creative, to solve problems and to grow as a human being. If our map becomes stuck, we become stuck. Ecologically embrace uncharted territories and enjoy the surprises and the inspiration.

By the way, it took us almost an infinite amount of time to find the chimpanzee that wrote this article for us. We would like to thank that infinite monkey!

Where there is the infinite, there is joy –
The Chandogya Upanishad

If you would like to explore infinity's cousin and develop your understanding of the Zero Point, come and see us at the 2012 NLP Conference in London where we will be delivering this as a workshop. ■

For further reading and exploration:

- Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.
- L. Michael Hall, *Dragon Slaying: dragons into princes*.
- John Overdurf and Julie Silverthorn, 'Beyond Words', audio.
- Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*.

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