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Bernie Neville

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## ***Taking Care of Business in the Age of Hermes***

**Bernie Neville**

### **The Story of Our Times**

For the past half century, we have been hearing from various sources that human consciousness and culture is undergoing some sort of transformation. The story we hear is sometimes the story of a collapsing civilization and an inevitable global catastrophe and sometimes a story of a coming bright new age, but the pessimistic and optimistic versions have certain themes in common when they address the nature of the contemporary world.

The story we hear is a story of complexity and chaos, of the dissolution of boundaries, of deceit, denial and delusion, of the preference for image over substance, of the loss of familial and tribal bonds, of the deregulation of markets, ideas and ethics, of an unwillingness of national leaders to confront reality and tell the truth, of the abandonment of rationality, of the proliferation of information, of a market-place so noisy that nothing can be clearly heard, of a world seen through a distorting lens, of an ever-tightening knot which we cannot unravel, or an ever-unraveling knot which we cannot tighten, of planetary dilemmas so profound that we cannot even think about them sensibly, let alone address them.

We hear that time, space, matter, truth, and logic have lost their stability and reliability. We hear that the collapse of our "grand narratives" is an inevitable consequence of the information revolution. We hear that our society is maintained by a constant flow of information, to the extent that it no longer matters what the information is about as long as the flow continues. We hear that the information society is enmeshed in a fantasy of the marketplace, in which everything is a commodity, exchange is an end in itself and the only value is market value. We hear that the boundaries that used to separate individuals and nations are fast disappearing.

We hear that there are no longer any absolutes. Looking for universal truths is a waste of time and attempts to establish any universal truth are naïve and misguided. Whatever currently passes for truth is maintained as truth only because it supports the current power structure.

We hear that reality is essentially plural, that there is no principle by which we can decide that one truth, one form of life, one interpretation should be preferred over another. We hear that the boundaries between truth and fantasy, self and other, matter

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and spirit, good and evil are dissolving. We find ourselves surrounded by images, with no solid ground on which to stand.

There are elements in this story that we may find exciting and others that we may find frightening. We may eject the story out of hand. Nevertheless, it is a story that has been going around for some time, and there are elements of it that are so firmly embedded in our consciousness that they are no longer questioned.

The management literature has added its own contributions to this story. The gurus of the new capitalism<sup>[2]</sup> tell us that we are now living in a world where nothing is stable, where organizations must be constantly ready to make a flexible response to rapidly changing market conditions. They tell us that the market is actually the only reason that organizations exist. (In fact, it's the only reason why human beings exist. We no longer belong to a nation, a society, a civilization or a community but to an economy.) Their story is about flexibility, individuality, diversity, the relativisation of values, and constant change. It has its special magic words which are employed in powerful incantations: *strategic management, just-in-time, managerial decentralization, devolution, deregulated environment, new work order, even enchanted workplace*, which point to a vision of a totally flexible organization without fixed boundaries and structures. One of its most popular variations is the happily-ever-after story of an emerging brave new world where the old hierarchical structures have dissolved and "partners" collaborate in meaningful work and those who deserve prosperity get it.

Many corporations have adopted this story as their own, and are happy to employ "change agents" to lead them in chanting the mantra: "Change is the only constant". Consultants, in their turn, tend to find the story a congenial one.

This way of thinking often carries the label "postmodern", though it is not really satisfactory to define a phenomenon by what it is not. However, whatever label we attach to it, it seems plausible to argue that there is something distinctive about contemporary Western consciousness and its institutions, which points to a specific sensibility, a specific way of dealing with the world. Some would argue that this is entirely new. I would suggest rather that it has been around for a long time, rooted in the magical-mythical foundations of our Western culture.

Viewed from a Jungian perspective, it is the reiteration of an archetypal pattern that has been with us for a very long time. For Jung, all behavior is patterned by archetypal images of great meaning and power, which human beings used to call gods. For Jung, these patterns are hard-wired in us. On the one hand, he called the archetypes "primordial images", but he also wrote of them as "instinctual patterns of behavior" which are genetically inherited, as "structures of the collective unconscious" and as "modes of apprehension" which shape our encounter with reality and take a peculiarly vivid form in the myths of ancient cultures. Whether or not we take Jung's speculations seriously, we can argue that the "mode of apprehension" we call postmodernity is simply the latest edition of an old story.

## All About Hermes

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The method of archetypal psychology is to attempt to see through this new story to the old story it is repeating and the god whose myth it belongs to. James Hillman suggests that we are always in one archetypal fantasy or another<sup>[3]</sup> I suggest that the archetypal fantasy that this story is enmeshed in is the fantasy of Hermes the god who is both Trickster and Transformer.

The Homeric **Hymn to Hermes** tells us how, to avoid detection by the gods, Maia, the nymph who was Zeus' lover, dwelt in a deep cave where she bore a son

*who was a shrewd and coaxing schemer,  
a cattle - rustling robber, and a bringer of dreams,  
a watcher by night and a gate-keeper, soon destined  
to show forth glorious deeds among the immortal gods*<sup>[4]</sup>

The hymn shows Hermes as a most precocious infant who, as he leaves the cave on the day he was born, comes across a tortoise. First he plays with it as any child might, then he kills it and makes a lyre out of its shell<sup>[5]</sup> Accompanying himself on this instrument he sings the very first song, which is about his parents' love-making.

Having joyfully and ironically sung of his parents' intercourse, he moves on to other things. He feels a craving for meat, so he leaves his lyre in his cradle and sets out to find some. For a rogue like Hermes there is one utterly obvious way to obtain the meat he craves. He steals it. When twilight falls, he seeks out the cattle of the gods where they are grazing under Apollo's supervision, and cuts fifty of them out of the herd.

To fool Apollo, he pulls the cows backwards by their tails so that their tracks point in the wrong direction and uses foliage to make the first pair of sandals, in order to disguise his own footprints.

Having invented stringed instruments and sandals, he now invents the fire-stick, and builds a fire. Next, he invents both cookery and religious sacrifice. He takes two of the cows he has stolen, slaughters and roasts them. By this time, he has obviously forgotten about his hunger, for instead of making a banquet for himself, he takes the meat (which he stole from the gods in the first place) and offers it to the gods, making sure that he packages the carcasses in twelve equal pieces (including an offering to himself as the twelfth of the Olympian gods.). Having performed the sacrifice, Hermes returns to his cradle, and lies gurgling and playing like any other baby. His mother scolds him for his thieving, at which Hermes vigorously declares his intention of becoming the Prince of Robbers, so that he can support the two of them in the manner they are entitled to.

The next day, Apollo arrives at the cave, having tracked the cows there with great difficulty, and angrily confronts his baby brother Hermes. Hermes lies shamelessly. He declares that he was only born yesterday, which is true enough, and then goes on to swear by the head of Zeus that he has never seen a cow in his life. Apollo won't accept this and picks up the baby Hermes to carry him to their father Zeus for judgment. Hermes' belly rumbles so loudly that Apollo drops him in disgust. Before the throne of Zeus, Hermes continues to lie, well knowing that nobody believes him, and eventually charms his way out of punishment by getting Zeus to laugh. Nevertheless, Zeus exacts

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from Hermes a promise not to lie to the gods again (though he need not necessarily tell the truth!) and sends his two sons off together to find the cattle.

So “left-brain” and “right-brain” go off together on their quest— Apollo assiduously examining the evidence in his search for truth and Hermes already knowing far more than he lets on. Realizing Hermes' great strength, Apollo tries to bind his hands together, but Hermes is far too slippery a character to be bound. As they sit together in the mouth of the cave, with Apollo continuing to accuse and Hermes continuing to deny, Hermes takes his lyre and begins to play. Apollo is charmed completely and begs to be given this wonderful instrument. Hermes willingly swaps it for the cattle and goes off to invent the Pan pipes.

So Apollo takes responsibility for music while Hermes becomes the god of herdsmen and shepherds (as well as cattle-rustlers), and of barter and negotiation (as well as stealing and deception). They become the best of friends. Hermes promises never to steal from Apollo again. He receives from Apollo his staff, or magic wand, for it is fitting that he should be a god of magic and illusion. Finally, he is designated messenger to Hades, the one who guides souls to the underworld.

### **God of the Crossroads**

Hermes is ubiquitous in Greek mythology. He appears in the myth of every god. He is the shape-shifter with many names and many forms: the god of travelers, the god of boundaries and boundary-crossing, the god of cowboys, the god of merchants and markets, the god of persuasiveness, the Trickster, the god of lies and deceit, the god of gamblers, the god of thieves, the god of illusions, the god of shamanic medicine, the god of the crossroads, the god of connections, of quicksilver, of fast footwork and smooth talking. He is slippery and seductive, the divine entrepreneur, a con man without ethics and without malice. He has no values of his own, no concern for substance. He slips into situations where he is not expected. He avoids confrontation; he has no interest in being a hero. He believes that everything is negotiable. He enjoys doing deals, being clever, playing the game. He is the herald of the gods, the connector, the carrier of information.

Hermes does not craft anything, like Hephaistos. He does not manage anything, like Zeus, or lead us to understanding, like Apollo or ensure the smooth functioning of society, like Hera, or harvest and hoard, like Kronos. He does not fight, like Ares or nourish, like Demeter, or protect the weak, like Artemis. He has no interest in good citizenship, like Athena or ecstasy, like Dionysos. He does not wish to stay at home, like Hestia, but is constantly on the move. He loves paradox and process, trickery and risk. He is ambiguous and many-faced. He is everybody's mate. Yet

Little is the profit he brings, and he beguiles endlessly  
the tribes of mortal men throughout the night<sup>[6]</sup>

The earliest image of Hermes is the stone-heap, which the ancient Greeks set up to mark crossroads and the boundaries of their land. From the first, he is the god of

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liminality, the god of borders, and comes to represent everything which is borderline: the border between my country and yours, between night and day, between truth and falsehood, between life and death, between the world of humans and the world of the gods, between sanity and madness, between citizen and alien, between right and wrong, between human and divine and (in his child, Hermaphrodite) between male and female. Such distinctions belong to his brother Apollo. Hermes belongs on neither side of these boundaries, but transports us across them. He has no temples, but is worshipped at every crossroad.

As god of boundaries, Hermes is also god of connections, an aspect that is manifested in his sexual enthusiasm. He spends a lot of his time chasing nymphs. He has casual and amiable sexual relationships with many goddesses. He is the god of "getting lucky" and the "one night stand".

There is nothing particularly original in applying the image of Hermes to our era. Jung, for one, was very conscious of the Hermetic in his own writing. New Age thinkers, particularly those with gnostic tendencies, are much inclined to the uncritical worship of Hermes. However, I want to suggest that we can find the myth of Hermes in the abstractions of the so-called postmodern analysts of our culture, in the fantasies of the money market and the descriptions of the "new work order" as surely as we can in the turgidities of Jung's alchemical writings.

For the last three or four hundred years, European consciousness has been dominated by other gods than Hermes. The Enlightenment and the birth of modern science were dominated by the image of Apollo, god of clarity, of light, of reason, of phallogocentric superiority [7]. The industrial age from which we are emerging was dominated by the image of Prometheus [8]. It is the failure of the Promethean fantasy that has precipitated us into the present age of uncertainty.

Prometheus, in Greek mythology, is the creator of men (though not of women), the superhuman hero who sacrifices himself by stealing fire from heaven, giving men light and heat and technology and thus freeing them from the domination of the gods and enabling them to become masters of the earth. The images of the Promethean myth - emancipation, technology, control, empowerment, progress - have shaped the guiding fantasy of the dominant (Western, masculine) consciousness for the past two or three hundred years. European culture has dwelt, more or less uncritically, in a fantasy of progress, of liberating humanity from the power of "Nature", of gaining control over the processes of life, of breaking free from poverty and ignorance and disease, and of doing all this through technology, through Prometheus' gift of fire and crafting. When one technology fails to deliver the paradise, we switch our faith to another, within the same fantasy of inevitable progress [9].

This fantasy is at present wavering, as it becomes apparent that every solution provided by technology brings with it new problems, that our drive to master the planet has been taking us, perhaps irreversibly, towards the destruction of the planet and humanity, that technology manages to enslave more people than it emancipates, that heroic revolution does not inevitably bring freedom. We are losing our ability and, indeed, our will to reduce the world to simple cause and effect sequences that we have the cunning to manage. The Promethean vision is fading. Paradise is postponed. European civilization

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has been shifting from an infatuation with Prometheus to an infatuation with Hermes

However, though Apollinian and Promethean values are no longer so much a part of mainstream thinking that they are unchallengeable, assumed simply to reflect the truth about the world, we still find some resistance to letting them go. We are still inclined to think that we ought to be able to understand and control our world, and to feel some nostalgia for the days when we dwelt happily in the fantasy that one day we would be able to.

The Promethean myth and the Apollomyth are versions of the myth of the masculine, misogynist hero, combating the darkness and chaos, conquering the she-dragon, liberating man from the power of uncontrolled nature. They have their roots in a patriarchal politics, which Apollo clearly supports and Prometheus resists in the name of heroic individuality. However, human consciousness was not always dominated by hero stories. Before the hero story came the mother story, a story that emerged from the primal human sense of oneness with the nurturing and devouring earth. The emergence of the hero story in Greece in the second millennium BC coincides with a political and cultural conquest by which an indigenous, matrilineal, nature-worshipping culture was replaced by the culture of the invading warlords. In the old story, Nature is Mother and we are part of her. In the new story, Nature, still female, is darkness and chaos and monstrous strength, which Apollo, or Prometheus, or Herakles must overcome through the clear light of his masculine intelligence or the strength of his masculine arm[10]

In classical Greece, a polytheistic consciousness enabled both stories to be heard at once, and the classical pantheon and its mythology represent a meeting of these two very different versions of reality, albeit in a political context which was essentially patriarchal. One place where we find the old story and the new story meeting is in the myth of Hermes, the smooth-tongued negotiator. It is Hermes who demonstrates that all the gods must be worshipped. Hermes is indeed the son of Zeus but his primary connection is with Maia, the nymph whose name simply means "old mother". In the Homeric hymn of Apollo, we find that god announcing at his birth that his task is to "prophesy the will of unerring Zeus"[11], then going off on his journey to establish the domination of reason over chaos by killing the she-dragon and taking over her shrine. Hermes' story has a similar structure, but Hermes is an anti-hero who is willing to subvert and destabilize the status quo and who announces to his mother that

I shall be master of whatever skill is best  
to provide for you and me forever: we shall not suffer  
as you bid me, to stay right here and be  
the only two immortals not plied with gifts and prayers.  
...And if my father does not allow me this, I shall surely  
try to be, as I no doubt can, the chief of robbers[12]

Monotheistic societies do not have this ability to hold two stories in balance. Over the past two thousand years, it has been the hero story which has generally represented orthodoxy, whether religious orthodoxy or scientific orthodoxy. The core assumptions of western civilization are anthropocentric and egocentric. The mother story has emerged from time to time, but proved unable to flourish in most political climates. Now we find the mother story emerging again in the contemporary Hermes culture - in

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feminism, deep ecology and nature mysticism. Hermes promises to subvert the patriarchy and see that Gaia/Maia gets the honor she deserves.

A Hermes consciousness delights in complexity. It trusts that what our rational minds perceive as chaos represents a higher level of order; it perceives a world at play where an Apollo consciousness sees a loss of control. The deceit and dishonesty, the opportunism, the lack of ethics, which characterize the infantile Hermes, are justified to him as destabilization of an oppressive system. "Mother", he says, "I'm only doing it for you."

However, nothing is unambiguous in the Hermes myth. Though the worship of Hermes seems to have originated with natives of the Greek peninsula who were dispossessed and marginalized when the Greeks arrived in the second millennium BC, we find Hermes getting by very well in the oppressors, in spite of his lack of commitment to the patriarchy. Zeus makes him his messenger and he performs his task admirably, using his persuasive powers on Zeus' behalf. Hermes will do whatever suits his advantage, and, as long as Zeus continues to hold the power, he is content to be Zeus' man. Meanwhile, he continues his game of subversion and destabilization. Not even Zeus can trust him.

## **Worshipping Hermes**

It seems apparent that, for a couple of decades, our business culture has recently been worshipping the god of the marketplace with an excess of devotion. We still see an infatuation with the magic hand of the marketplace, enthusiastically supported by political leaders from both the right and the left. (Hermes is the god of disguises. He can disguise himself equally readily as a socialist or as a conservative). We have seen paper entrepreneurs become cultural heroes, twenty-three year old foreign exchange dealers (selected for their gambling instinct) become obscenely wealthy, educational institutions devoting their energies to pouring out a flood of economists and accountants, and rural and manufacturing industries brought to the edge of destruction. The consequences have been catastrophic for national economies, for public morality, for countless unemployed and for the political system. Nevertheless, the myth has not lost any of its power. It is rationalized into a belief that the unregulated marketplace is the source of growth, prosperity, freedom and democracy. The fact that governments have been acting on this belief for a quarter of a century with few positive results to show for it does not inhibit their faith.

Economists and moralists will have their own explanations as to why the infatuation with an unregulated marketplace should have had such consequences. I only want to point to the myth, where we see Zeus taking it on himself to control Hermes' infantile behavior, demanding that the young thief come to an accommodation with Apollo. It may be that the only societies able to avoid the catastrophic consequences of a Hermes inflation will be those where the intellectual and business culture is under the firm control of the Zeus, and where the enthusiasms of Hermes are balanced by those of his brother Apollo - reason and moderation. The Greeks were well aware of the dangers of monotheism, and could have warned us that Hermes, the inventor and trader, is not



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interested in producing and harvesting and hoarding. He is not even particularly interested in wealth. He gets his thrills out of doing deals and playing in the marketplace rather than in accumulating assets. Neither is he interested in ethics. If we want ethics, we will have to look elsewhere - to Zeus for the ethics of absolute moral law and the ethics of traditional values, to Hera for the ethics of social bonds and social stability, to Demeter for the ethics of caring and nurturing, to Eros for the ethics of relationship, to Apollo for the ethics of rationality, to Hestia for the ethics of service, to Artemis for the ethics of earth-consciousness, to Aphrodite for an aesthetic ethics and to Athena for common sense and the ethics of citizenship. In the marketplace of a postmodern consciousness, ethics, like truth and relationship, has been deregulated. The only ethics we can attribute to Hermes are the ethics of opportunism.

However, it is not only the business and political cultures that are suffering a Hermes-inflation. Hermes has entered into areas such as education, health and welfare which once belonged to other gods. In education, for instance, we have seen the enduring notion of education as the transmission of culture (Seneca fantasy) and the pursuit of meaning (an Apollo fantasy), striving with some success to resist the fantasy of education as context for growth and relationship (Demeter, Dionysos, Eros), and a stronger challenge from a fantasy of education as skilling (Prometheus), only to be seduced by the charm of Hermes. Teachers and consultants have become "knowledge workers", constructing knowledge and selling it to whoever can afford it. Educational institutions now happily take their wares into the marketplace and hawk them to whoever will buy. Debates about what is worth teaching have been replaced by debates about what will sell. Knowledge and skills are no longer imagined to be worth teaching for their own sake, but are justified only by their current market value. Areas of education that are hard to commodify (e.g. Humanities) are thought to have little value. Since the god of the marketplace is also the herald and messenger, the god of information exchange, there is plenty of attention given to communication and its technologies, but rather less to the notion of what is worth communicating. Substance has given way to image, and content has yielded to process and exchange.

The god of cheating and illusion has no interest in substance in any case. So we see the notion of essential substance disappearing from discourse as it has disappeared from physics. We find it disappearing from the world of finance, where the opulence of the gold bar and the tactility of the banknote have been replaced by the manipulation of a few molecules on a computer disk. We find it disappearing in the arts also, where considerable effort and technical skill is expended in creating artworks which demonstrate only the pointlessness of creating artworks. We find the postmodern analysts of our culture engaged in discourse about the pointlessness of engaging in discourse, using an abstract, abstruse, pseudo-Apollonine logic to disguise the fact that they are saying nothing about nothingness. Hermes, after all, the Trickster, the god of disguises. In following the convolutions of their thinking, we might be reminded of Apollo, clarity and rationality personified, tracking his apparently backwards-walking cattle through the mountains and eventually finding not his herd but a baby playing in the dark.

Play is one Hermes image that is used by some postmodern writers to express (justify? romanticize? disguise? explore? hide?) the groundlessness to which their thinking leads. Hermes is quite happy with groundlessness, whether it is deconstruction or

bootstrap theory or the Void or the two-dollar company. His winged feet never touch the ground anyway.

If we accept the notion that we are living through a particularly intense experience of the Hermes myth, we will not be surprised to encounter this language of "play" and "gaming" in a culture engaged in uncritical adulation of the entrepreneur and trapped in an addiction to gambling. The pathology of Hermes is manifested in the paper entrepreneur, who grows nothing and manufactures nothing, but plays the market with skill and daring, sees no distinction between honest and dishonest dealing, and makes and loses paper fortunes with no concern (or even awareness) of the destruction of human hopes and human lives which this involves. It is manifested also in the image of the "advertising man", surrounded by the Hermes images of mobility, communication and fleeting satisfaction, in his private jet or sports car, setting up a "deal", with one nymph on his arm and another on the phone.

We find a similar shift away from substance in postmodern organizations and in the Hermes personalities that populate them. We see many organizations and institutions entirely given over to the worship of Hermes. We see many more persuaded that Hermes' way is the way to go if they are to be prosperous, and seeking help from consultants in dumping the old-fashioned values which have given them years of stability and move into the happy state of constant motion, opportunism and insecurity which characterize the postmodern corporate world. We see others clinging religiously to their traditional values and procedures in the hope that this new world will go away. Others again sense that the world has changed and know that they must change with it determined to do so without abandoning their core values, yet unsure of how they might do this.

## **The Hermes Corporation**

The Hermes-inflated corporation is committed to nothing but doing deals and making money. Sometimes, it is established just for this purpose. Sometimes, it represents the subversion of an organization which was originally set up to produce goods or services but where the takeover by a Hermes consciousness has turned the capacity to produce goods and services into a commodity to be bartered, just as another organization's capacity to create or analyze ideas becomes a commodity to be bartered. Hermes has no commitment to the music he enjoys so much. He happily trades it for a herd of cattle. Even outside media and advertising organizations, where the monotheistic worship of Hermes, the rogue and liar, is most obsessive, we find level upon level of management whose function is not production but information (or disinformation) exchange. People in such an organization do not need to have a commitment to the task itself. They need only know how to "facilitate" it. Hermes the facile, the one who makes things easy, the smooth talker, is equally present in facilitation at its best and manipulation at its worst. In the Hermes-inflated organization, it is easier to advance through fabrication and smooth talking than through competence, loyalty or hard work.

One reason why the Hermes-inflated people in a corporation have no commitment to the substance of what they do is that they are all on the way to somewhere else.

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Hermes organizations are full of people whose only interest in their present position is as a stepping stone to somewhere else. Mr. Black used to have a lowly position in the Department of Conservation, moved to a higher level in the Department of Education, and is looking forward to stepping up a further grade in the Department of Transport. He has no interest in Forestry, Education or Transport, but plenty of interest in self-promotion. Ms Brown has taken a management position in the Health bureaucracy not because Health is important to her or because she wants to learn something about it but in order to make "contacts" which will be financially useful to her when she returns to the private sector. Hermes is, after all, the god of travelers. We tend to take this situation for granted now, yet it is not long since promotion and preferment in corporations and State bureaucracies were determined by seniority (in the Zeus organization) or family relationship (in the Hera organization) or even administrative competence (in the Apollo organization), rather than by the extensiveness of one's networks and the glossiness of one's CV. We may have abandoned the Senex and Hera fantasies with relief, but the Hermes fantasy, in which promotion and preferment are decided by mateship, smooth talking, doing deals, developing an image, and/or conning a committee, is hardly to be preferred.

The same fantasy defines the role of the chief executive of the postmodern corporation, whose time and energies are spent networking, making contacts, traveling, persuading, massaging, manipulating, rather than having a hands-on role in the organization's daily business. It is seen in the blind faith in 'managerialism', which sees the management of organizations taken over completely by people with qualifications in the Hermes fields of commerce, finance, economics and marketing, and does not notice the disappearance from management of those with experience and skills (or even interest) in the specific fields in which the organization is involved. The fantasy of "content-free management" belongs to the world of Hermes. So does the mobility of the "casualised" workforce, forced to be always on the move in a new work order which has no respect for notions of employer-employee loyalty (Hera), or for notions of employee security (Demeter), or for people's need to belong to place (Hestia) and people (Eros).

The arrival or emergence of a Hermes consciousness in an organization hitherto dominated by the Zeus image of patriarchal power or the Promethean image of the machine may be greeted with relief or delight. At last, process is to be valued like power and product. We are all encouraged to see ourselves as entrepreneurs. As the Hermes inflation sets in, ungrounded "facilitation" and unending exchange and negotiation take the place of decision-making and productivity, and simple visions and procedures get lost in an infinite complexification. The old certainties are undermined, the old roles and structures are destabilized. The delight fades. The ancient autocratic organization which everyone hated is transformed into a fantasy of "the good old days", when the organization was purposive, when employees knew where they stood and had a sense of being looked after and achieving something.

A characteristic which many Hermes-inflated managers share is slipperiness. They are often charming people who skillfully disguise their lack of interest in substantive issues. Since they believe in nothing, it is easy for them to avoid conflict and remain everybody's friend. They skillfully avoid making decisions where matters other than their self-interest are at stake; they avoid answering a direct question, or taking responsibility for anything, just as the infantile Hermes does. They are rogues and liars.

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but can be very inventive and engaging ones. Very often, they have gained their position through disguise and deceit, adopting the Ares disguise in a corporation looking for a leader committed to fighting passionately for its survival and prosperity, adopting the Apollo disguise in a corporation seeking an executive committed to dealing rationally with its structures and procedures, adopting the Athena disguise in a corporation committed to participation and democratic processes. In fact, Hermes-inflated managers are totally free of commitments to principles, products or people. They are always prepared to put their own interests ahead of those of the organization and will switch allegiances and ideologies whenever opportunity beckons. Loyalty is not a value they rate highly. They expect it neither of themselves nor of their subordinates.

In the Hermes-inflated organization, life is a game. There are no ultimate values, everything is negotiable, and the attitude towards conventional societal "truths" is ironical or cynical. Roguery is more likely to be admired and rewarded than condemned. Yet rogues and liars have their own image of truth. From the Zeus perspective, truth is given, comes from God or the State or the Chief Executive. From the Apollo perspective, it is manifested through the clear light of the intellect. For Prometheus it is enough to find out how things work. For Hermes, truth is a flash of beauty, glimpsed for the briefest of moments and always alluringly elusive, like the nymphs that ancient Greek travelers glimpsed for a moment in the forest, pursued, and lost, never sure that they had really seen anything. This image of truth is as present in the fantasies of postmodern science as it is in the fantasies of postmodern literature and postmodern politics. (It is not uncommon for the Hermes personality, male or female, to pursue the same fantasy in relationships.)

Hermes has his own way with language. When the literature of new capitalism speaks fondly of "collaboration", "participative decision-making", "empowerment", "communities of practice" and "partnerships" it is Hermes the Trickster talking. Hermes happily disguises himself as Athena or Eros. If we understand such terms the way they are understandable in an Athena culture or an Eros culture, we are likely to be deceived. While such words may be used to persuade us that the new work order is genuinely concerned with organizational democracy and empowerment, the ideology of new capitalism does not really permit workers to challenge its basic assumptions. Organizational democracy may be a useful tool to meet the demands of the market, but it is often allowable only within a framework that believes with absolute faith that the market represents all that is worth valuing<sup>[13]</sup>

We might reasonably expect that, in an organization dominated by Hermes, everything will be deregulated, including ideas, and that the core assumptions of the organization will be flexible and changeable. This is rarely the case. Hermes does not work alone. The power of Zeus permeates the wider culture, and has the capacity to turn Hermes's free marketplace into another absolutist ideology designed to maintain the power of those in charge. We have seen economic rationalism, which first emerged as a Hermes-like perspective, turn into a fundamentalist belief<sup>[14]</sup> Where Athena and Eros are dominant in an organization, power-sharing and community are valued for their own sake, and Hermes plays a significant role in facilitating them. However, where we find organizational democracy being used to maintain the power of those in charge, we can recognize Hermes in his role of servant and messenger of Zeus<sup>[15]</sup>

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Yet the Hermes energy in an organization drives it towards greater mobility and flexibility. The Hermes organization relishes complex situations. People are not fussed by ambiguity, paradox and risk. They are imaginative and inventive. They function freely and fluidly, unconstrained by the hierarchies and structures of the Zeus or Apollo organization. Their ambitions are not constrained by convention or tradition. They readily cross boundaries, both the boundaries that define the organization's goals and those that define its membership. Globalization, diversification and multiculturalism are embraced with enthusiasm. The solid, material and human assets of an organization are readily abandoned in favor of virtual property and virtual people. The Hermes organization does not think in terms of a mission. It is not interested in being heroic, in fighting for something it wants. It will always prefer to get what it wants by charm, seduction or trickery. It is always on the move. Everything in the Hermes-inflated organization is "fast". To quote Tom Peters, one of the gurus of "fast capitalism":

I like the word "ephemeral" almost as much as "fashion" or "fickle". In fact I'm fond of speaking of the "four ephemerals": ephemeral organizations...joined in ephemeral combinations...producing ephemeral products...for ephemeral markets...FAST[16]

This privileging of the ephemeral, insubstantial and transitory, which we somehow have come to accept as natural, belongs to the Age of Hermes. When we are asked to accept that this is the way it has to be, we need to reflect with some suspicion on whose good it serves to have everyone believe this. Myths do not necessarily reflect a deep and eternal wisdom about life. They reflect how life is experienced, not how it ought to be experienced. And, sometimes, they simply reflect the way those in power want us to experience it.

### **Trickery and Transformation**

The Greeks had no Satan in their pantheon[17]. The nasty or pathological aspects of behavior were shared out among all the gods. Hermes has his good side and his bad side. However, to make distinctions between positive and negative, healthy and pathological, we must adopt the perspective of Apollo. Hermes himself makes no such distinctions. From the perspective of Apollo (and Zeus and Prometheus), the deceit, delusion, irresponsibility and amorality apparent in many postmodern organizations are symptoms of a Hermes pathology. So are the boundary-crossing, the substitution of image for substance, the attack on rationality, the opportunism, the groundlessness of the winged god of illusion, the slipperiness of "the unraveller" who cannot be pinned up or tied down, the restlessness of the god of travelers who never stays in one place, the ambiguity of the god who lives on the margins. They are also the tricky elements that make change possible.

Jung warned us that, in every inflation, we will find pathology, as the negative aspects of that complex or archetype find full expression. In the above account, it is the pathological that predominates, for it is in our pathologies that we are most likely to become aware of the gods, at the social as well as the personal level. Yet we need a Hermes consciousness to escape the oppression of the old orthodoxies and to avoid

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new ones.

Hermes doesn't have an orthodoxy. He does not have a particular obsession or a particular perspective like the other gods. Even the perspective that values not having a perspective is relativised as only one perspective among many. As Rafael Lopez-Pedraza puts it

[The other gods] would seem to be the center of specific aspects of life to which they give their imprint. Whereas Hermes permeates the whole world because of his possibility of making connections, his commerce with, and constellation of the other gods from his borderline. He is the connection-maker and he is the Messenger of the gods... Hermes has no need to fight for his center; he does not have one [18]

The manifestation of a Hermes-consciousness in recent decades has provided a long awaited relief from the limitations of Apollonine consciousness and Promethean consciousness [19]. With the Enlightenment, Apollo invited humankind to see the world clearly for the first time. In the technological and industrial revolution Prometheus invited us to break free from the domination of the gods and gain control of our world. Hermes has recently been busy unfreezing the certainties of all these gods and destabilizing the structures that support them. He is inviting us to honor all the gods equally and to allow soul back into the world, and we can find him doing this even in human understandings and behaviors that we find destructive. It is consistent with Jungian theory to argue that it is the suppression of Hermes for so long that has led to this outbreak of Hermes-pathology, and that the best way of dealing with this is to acknowledge and value the positive manifestation of the god.

Among the gifts of Hermes which have been too rarely acknowledged in our organizations are imagination, flexibility, intuition, the sense of the sacred, playfulness, irony, delight in paradox, grace, magic, heterogeneity, complexity, multiplicity, luck, healing and connection with the feminine. A healthy organization accepts such gifts with gratitude, while acknowledging that the giver is not entirely to be trusted. The Protector of Travelers sometimes guides us on our way and sometimes leads us astray.

All of the Olympian gods are complex in their manifestations, though none quite as complex as the god of complexity himself. It is Hermes the Rogue who provides the means to tell a sort of truth about the roguery and deception that seem to be epidemic in business, politics and the academy. It is Hermes the Trickster who undermines the oppressive, patriarchal structures that have been dominant in our organizational cultures, and allows the possibility of transformation. It is Hermes, the Bringer of Dreams, who provides the perspective of this paper and insists that other perspectives be also honored. It is Hermes, Lord of the Road, who can guide us through the borderlands we now inhabit. And each time we arrive at a new boundary, a new crossroad, it is Hermes who enables us to choose which way to go.

The ancient Greeks could have warned us that we give all our worship to one god not only do we sentence ourselves to suffer the pathology of that god, but we find ourselves under attack from all the others. However, if we worship Hermes as one god among others, as his myth insists we do, we can find in a Hermes-consciousness the flexibility and inventiveness that may yet save us from the catastrophe to which our

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excessive faith in Apollo and Prometheus seems to have condemned us. The god of transformation, paradox and ambiguity is unraveling a pattern of thinking and behavior that was, in its arrogant assertion of its own absolute truth, destroying the world. We have to be on the watch that the Trickster god does not lead us into a path that is just as destructive.

Over the past century, the taken-for-granted truths of the scientific-industrial age have been subjected to challenges they cannot answer, as we spiral down through the degrees of doubt towards absolute doubt in the core assumptions of our culture. The nihilism of some postmodern thinkers seems like a manifestation of absolute doubt. If we have no basis for valuing anything over anything else, they say, if we have no justification for arguing that one perspective is better than another, then nothing is to be valued or believed at all. We can avoid such nihilism by insisting that all values are to be valued, that truth is found in the perspectival acknowledgement of all of these limited perspectives, just as Hermes demonstrates that all the gods are to be worshipped.

Unfortunately, we have to learn again how to be polytheistic, how to acknowledge all the squabbling gods together rather than take sides and join in the fight. When the one god lets us down, we tend to redirect all our worship to another. We must resist the impulse to return to a fundamentalist Zeus consciousness, or return to the monotheistic worship of Apollo or Prometheus, or even to the monotheistic worship of Gaia/Maia which the deep ecologists would promote. We must honestly worship all the gods together - Aphrodite and Athene, Ares and Eros, Demeter and Dionysos, Hera and Hestia, Persephone and Poseidon - to accept all their half-truths, to honor all their values, and to put up with their constant squabbling.

### **Guide to the Underworld**

Hermes is probably the god whom consultants worship most devoutly. He is, of course the god of transformation. He is the god who subverts the established order of things, who unfreezes what is frozen so as to make change possible. On top of that, he is the god who creates visions (and illusions), who insinuates himself into places (like smoke under the door), does his magic, and leaves. He is, as the god of the free market, happy to sell himself to whoever wants to buy. He spends a lot of time and energy marketing himself. He thrives on images. He facilitates; he makes things easy. He gets a kick out of seduction. He is just passing through. The profession is solidly enmeshed in the health and pathology of the Hermes archetype.

Hermes' skills and inventiveness and his lack of concern for his own status and dignity made him in a particular way the god of servants. He was quite happy to act the servant, not only of Zeus but of all the Olympian gods. It is an image that sits well with the profession of a consultant. Consultants who are really interested in facilitating the process of their client organizations depend on a Hermes consciousness to do it. Consultants are rarely thrust into the role of heroes. If they were, they might well invoke Athena or Herakles to assist them. Sometimes, they are paid to be soothsayers, to proclaim the hitherto hidden truth. In matters of truth and prophecy, they need to

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invoke Apollo. Most often, however, they are contracted to guide an organization across a boundary (psychological, structural or economic), without too much disturbing those who contracted them. If they wish to appear to be diligent servants, they need to pray to Hermes for his gifts of plausibility, cunning and luck, while pretending to be independent, logical and knowledgeable in the advice they give.

The myth and personality of Hermes give us many images that we can develop in exploring the role of the organizational consultant or change agent. There is Hermes the Persuader, Hermes the Magician, Hermes the Bringer of Dreams, Hermes the Trickster, Hermes the Seducer, Hermes the Messenger, Hermes the Protector of Travelers, Hermes the Speedster, Hermes the Cowboy, Hermes the Transformer, Hermes the Connector, Hermes the Healer, Hermes the Spy, Hermes the Keeper of Secrets, Hermes the Border-crosser, Hermes the Inventor, not to mention Hermes the Thief, Hermes the Confidence Man and Hermes the Gambler.

The particular Hermes image I want to amplify here is that of Guide to the Underworld. Any consultant interested, as I am, in the unconscious dynamics of an organization is operating within a metaphor of depth. Hermes is the god who takes us there.

Depth is where Hades dwells, and it is where the depth-oriented consultant takes the awareness of the organization and brings it back. Hermes is the only god who is able to visit Hades, the only god who can cross the border between light and darkness, between life and death.

There are a number of aspects of this visit to Hades (who, in Greek mythology, is both a person and a place) as far as the consultant and client are concerned.

One is the visit to Hades as the site of the unconscious dimensions of organizational life: the archaic undifferentiated belongingness which submerges the individual in a larger self and the instincts (such as fight and flight) which generate impulsive action; the magic rites ritually performed to keep the organization safe; the mythical narrative in which the organization's core assumptions about itself are enmeshed.

A second is a visit to Hades as the site of doubt - operational, ideological, ethical or absolute - in the organization. Hades is the places where the organization is lost, confused and depressed.

The third is the visit to Hades as the site of death and new life in the organization, to discover what in the organization is dying and what is about to be born. (Hades, the god of death, often identified with Dionysos, the god of new life.)

Fourth is the visit to Hades as the shadow of the organization, all the aspects of the organization that contradict the organization's image of itself.

Fifth is a visit to Hades as the world on the "other side", the hidden and unknown world outside the sunlit world of the organization's consensus reality, the secrets carried by the marginalized people in the organization.

All in all, visiting Hades is a risky business, but Hermes is the god of risk-taking. The



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point of the journey, of course, is to bring the client organization back from the Underworld and together examine what we have found in the clear light of Apollon's sun. But Hermes is only interested in the journey. The substance of what the organization finds and brings back is for other gods to bother about. It is not even wise to count on Hermes to bring the client back. He does not promise a two-way trip. His role is to guide the soul to Hades. He may be content to leave it there.

The consultant's Hermes-consciousness and Hermes-energy will take the process just so far: to put the organization in touch with the unconscious, imaginal, irrational, instinctual dimensions of its existence. If the client organization is to be supported in the process, if it is to understand and articulate what it has learned, and take purposive and productive action, other gods have to be present.

Jung demonstrated in his writings that, in the personal psyche, there is drive towards "individuation" - a dynamic that strives to resolve the polarity between the unconscious and conscious aspects of the self. Abraham Maslow's researches uncovered further evidence of an instinctual tendency towards what he called "self-actualization". Carl Rogers became convinced through his research and practice as a therapist that our growth is shaped by a "formative tendency". The wide acceptance of the image of the organization as a living organism in recent management literature shows a growing conviction that organizations show the same sort of tendency. As long as people's observations of organizations were shaped by the metaphor of the machine, they simply did not detect this tendency, but it is now possible to see that organizations are self-organizing, nonlinear, open systems like plants and animals. Change is "self-generating". From within this different metaphor, it is obvious that organizations have within themselves an "individuating", "actualizing", "self-organizing" or "formative" tendency. They have, in Goldstein's words:

[their] own capacity for transformation, requiring only the right conditions for activation. That is, nonlinear systems have locked up within their nonlinearity a tendency towards change, growth, and development. This innate potential is similar to how an entire oak tree is contained in an acorn and only requires the right conditions to emerge. In fact, nonlinear systems are essentially evolving systems, transforming into greater and greater complexity[20]

The realm of growth is the realm of Maia/Gaia, Hermes' mother, a realm where Hermes is most happily active.

Hermes has many, many titles, but he does not appear anywhere to have the title of Teacher, Preacher, Carer, Director, Builder, Engineer or Action Man, and he is no fan of hard work. The Hermes way to organizational transformation is more playful. If the images are activated, if the flow of information is not inhibited, if the connections are established, if nonlinear systems are unlocked, if the boundaries are explored, if power and role and status are set aside, if belief is relativised (including the belief that change is the only constant), if doubt is acknowledged (including doubt about the messages of Hermes), if ambiguity and paradox are welcomed, if the bonds are loosened, if marginal people are included and listened to, if delight is expressed, then something happens. What that something will be is unpredictable, but we can watch out for Hermes' trickery and count on Hermes' luck. And if we want that something to be

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productive, we will not let our infatuation with Hermes blind us to the need to worship all the gods, including the gods of rational structure, social responsibility, purposeful action and inner focus. But the other gods won't change anything themselves, because they don't let go. Transformation requires the Trickster.

## Notes

[1] See for instance J. Gebser (1949); M. McLuhan (1967); F. Capra, (1982); J. Lyotard (1983); J. Gleick (1988); J. R. Saul (1992); W. I. Thompson (1996); K. Egan (1997); R. Kegan (1994)

[2] See for instance P. Drucker (1993); C. Handy (1989); T. Peters (1994); J. H. Boyett and H. Conn (1992)

[3] See J. Hillman (1977).

[4] Athanassakis, *ibid.*, p. 31: 13 -16.

[5] The first recorded instance of "value-added production"?

[6] Athanassakis, *ibid.* p. 47: 576 - 8.

[7] Gilbert Durand suggests that the myth of Apollo, with its images of light, clarity and vision and its themes of logic, rationality, detached observation and spiritual enlightenment took hold of the European imagination in the seventeenth century. Even thinkers whose ideas were totally opposed worked out their arguments within the same metaphoric framework.

"An important thing to note here is that the myth was stronger, and more pregnant with effects upon this century, than the disputes which would be called 'ideological'. It mattered very little that Bossuet fulminated against the quietism of Fenelon, Boileau against the modernism of Charles Perrault; whether Moliere attacked Visé or Boursault and Descartes attacked Gassendi..., the fact remained that they all spoke the same language which was an Apollonic language of Classical Idealism." G. Durand (1981), p. 4.

[8] "Mythically a whole network of images made up what would become a Promethean torch as the eighteenth century ended, the mythology of the Sun King, or the Apollonianism of the Classic ideal." *Ibid.*, p.3.

[9] For further discussion of Prometheus in this context, see B. Neville, (1996) "Prometheus, the Technologist" *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* . 15 (2)12 - 23.

[10] Gimbutas (1982) argues that the matrilineal culture of Neolithic Europe "contrasted strongly with the ensuing proto-Indo-European culture which was patriarchal, stratified, pastoral, mobile and war-oriented, superimposed on all Europe, except the southern and western fringes, in the course of three waves of infiltration from the Russian steppe between 4500 and 2500 B.C. During and after this

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period the female deities ...were largely replaced by the predominantly male divinities of the Indo – Europeans. p.9 . See also J. Campbell (1964) p 73ff : J. Campbell & C. Musès (1991). On the “mythological defamation ” of goddesses, see C. Keller (1988) chapter 2.

[11] Athanassakis, *ibid.*, p. 19: 132.

[12] I, p. 35: 166 -175.

[13] For a discussion of the use of language in “fast capitalist ” texts, see J. P Gee, and C. Lankshear . (1995).

[14] We find the same phenomenon in the dogmatism of many poststructuralist writers.

[15] It was Hermes who persuaded Prometheus that he could end his torture by giving Zeus the secret of how to maintain his power forever - by sharing it with the other gods.

[16] T. Peters (1992), p. 15f.

[17] Many of their Semitic and African neighbours did have the notion of a Satan figure as the embodiment of evil, and sophisticated or well- travelled Greeks in classical times would have been familiar with this. However, such a figure is absent from their own mythological narratives.

[18] R. Lopez-Pedraza (1977), p.8

[19] This is not to suggest that this is the first time that this archetype has been dominant in shaping human consciousness, only that it has been peculiarly manifest in European cultures, especially English-language cultures, since the 1980s. Furthermore, the Hermes image is simply the European variant of an amoral, opportunistic, transformative deity common to many cultures and regularly labelled “Trickster”.

[20] Goldstein (1994).

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